SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

Buddhism and Islam

Mutual Engagements in Southeast Asia and Japan

Kieko Obuse

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Buddhism and Islam

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By

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Abbreviations

Ar.	Arabic
Ch.	Chinese
Gk.	Greek
Ja.	Japanese
Skt.	Sanskrit
Tib.	Tibetan

Notes on Transliteration, Foreign Names, and Translation

Transliterations of Arabic and Japanese terms follow the IJMES standards and the modified Hepburn style, respectively. Japanese names are rendered with their given names first, while Chinese names are provided with their family names first, according to the traditional order. After the first mention, authors with Malay names are referred to, despite the convention, by their 'last' names, while those with Thai names are referred to by their given names. Bibliographical entries for Tibetan and Burmese names are also listed in traditional order. English translations of all Japanese, Arabic, and Thai materials, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and Change in Buddhist-Muslim Engagements

Buddhist-Muslim relations are often characterized by conflict and incompatibility. The recent surge of communal tension between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and the Taliban's destruction of the giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan in 2001, seem to exemplify this predicament. For the 'historically aware,' these events may also be an all too clear confirmation of the inherent 'bad blood' between Buddhists and Muslims, or more specifically, of Muslim hostility toward Buddhists, whose history goes back to the putative destruction of the famous Nalanda monastery on the Indian subcontinent a thousand years ago.[1] While the socio-political factors in contemporary cases of communal conflicts have been pointed out, the standard view of Buddhism and Islam being doctrinally incompatible, most typically as polytheism (or atheism) and monotheism respectively, continues to evoke in the minds of many a profound irreconcilability of the two traditions and their followers.[2] Such representation, however, does not reflect the startling diversity, both diachronic and synchronic, that is found in the ways in which Buddhists and Muslims have perceived—and engaged with—each other. The failure to do justice to the kaleidoscopic processes in which their mutual understandings (as well as self-representations) evolve in their continuously unfolding dynamism partly derives from the lack of a picture, or a narrative, that fruitfully combines insights from such scholarly endeavors as history, sociology, and anthropology, with those of 'theologies,' i.e., doctrinal reflections, developed by Buddhists and Muslims themselves. A perspective that weaves

1 Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1–4. The historicity of this event has been variably challenged, making it a myth. Audrey Truschke, "The Power of the Islamic Swords in Narrating the Death of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 57: 4 (2018), 406–35. See also Chapter 2. On the reception of the Bamiyan Buddhas across history, including the global impact of their destruction in 2001, see Llewelyn Morgan, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

2 Buddhism has also been described as agnosticism. See, e.g., Thomas Cleary, "Buddhism and Islam," *Transactions of the International Conferences of Orientalists in Japan* 27 (1982), 31. More recently, the difference between Buddhism and Islam has been described by Muslim scholars as that of non-theism and theism respectively (see Chapter 4).

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together socio-political and doctrinal issues will allow for a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

The present book seeks to de-essentialize the common views that Buddhist-Muslim relations are inherently confrontational due to the seeming incompatibility of their traditions. To this end, it focuses on doctrinal perspectives in understanding the complex reality of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. The project is driven by the conviction that Buddhist-Muslim relations urgently need an examination that brings to life their diversity and fluidity, as reflected in the lived experiences of individuals, along with their feelings, concerns, and aspirations. It regards doctrinal issues as essential components of such processes in that they innervate the worldviews of religious practitioners and inspire their responses to their religious others. At the same time, doctrines are constantly subject to negotiation and interpretation so that the same set of teachings can be presented in diametrically opposite ways to support different agendas, be they political, social, or personal.[3] A carefully contextualized attention to Buddhist and Muslim 'theologies' can therefore lead to a more holistic understanding of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. As will be shown in the following pages, history provides plenty of evidence for peaceful coexistence as well as active collaboration, 'despite' the seeming difference between their traditions. Moreover, how much difference is recognized between Buddhists and Muslims themselves, and to what extent the perceived difference is regarded as a hindrance to coexistence, depend on the context. They are not preconditioned to fall out with each other.

The present work examines how doctrines have been interpreted, negotiated, and appropriated in various stages of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in response to shifting socio-political and cultural circumstances and in accordance with the personal inclinations of the scholars involved. It demonstrates doctrinal thinking to be the unstable outcome of open-ended dynamic processes. What emerges from the analysis is an extraordinary picture that shows how their mutually apprehended differences have helped Buddhists and Muslims develop diverse, even creative, ways to relate to their religious others.

3 As seen in the subsequent chapters, religious differences are emphasized or de-emphasized depending on the socio-political situations surrounding the inter-religious relations in question. See, e.g., Joachim Gentz, "Buddhism and Chinese Religions," in *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2008), 185; Elizabeth Harris, "Buddhism and the Religious Other," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, eds. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

1 Challenges Accompanying the Study of Buddhist-Muslim Engagements

The task of bringing to light the dynamic diversity found in Buddhist-Muslim engagements involves challenging two relatively neglected areas in the study of Buddhism and Islam. They are both closely related to political and methodological imbalances that resulted from the Euro-Christo-centric perspective, long dominating the academic as well as the broader, public discourses on religion. The first challenge consists in dealing with the overall lack of attention this topic has received. The scarcity of comprehensive research on Buddhist-Muslim engagements can largely be attributed to the fact that it generally falls outside the concerns of (post-)Christian societies in the Euro-American West, whose primary concern has been their relations with the so-called Islamic Middle East, a tendency aggravated by the 9/11 attacks. While the relative absence of cases of serious collective conflict between Buddhists and Muslims may have also been a factor in the past,[4] the situation, as mentioned above, is changing rapidly with the rise of religious nationalism and communal tension between Buddhists and Muslims in South and Southeast Asia. Moreover, the problems subsumed under the banner of "Islam vs. the West"[5] can no longer be reduced to events occurring in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. This is not the least because the Islamic world has been recentering itself beyond the Middle East. In terms of population, the biggest concentration of Muslims is now found in Southeast Asia.

While connected with the Middle East, the Muslim-majority societies of Southeast Asia have been developing indigenous Islamic 'civilizational identities,' reflecting their deeply multi-cultural and multi-religious environments, where Buddhism has often played a major role.[6] Malaysia is an intriguing

4 Ryōko Nishii, *Shi o meguru jissen shūkyō* (Tokyo: Sekai Shishōsha, 2001), 12.

5 This classical formulation derived from the notion of a clash of civilizations, originally proposed by Bernard Lewis, and was theorized by Samuel Huntington in his famous 1993 article and his 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster). It has been criticized globally, for example, by major Malaysian Muslim intellectuals. Osman Bakar, "Islam's Destiny: A Civilisational Bridge between the East and the West," in his *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays* (Bandar Seri Bagawan: UBD Press, 2014), 70, 83–4 (for notes 6 and 7). On the ground, however, such essentialist views have been increasingly common in Buddhist-Muslim socio-political contestations in Southeast Asia. Raymond Scupin and Christopher M. Joll, "Buddhist-Muslim Dynamics in Siam/Thailand," in *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, eds. Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson, 101–35. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), see 125f. See also Chapter 3.

6 The spirit of the long tradition of religious diversity and tolerance in the region is still found in contemporary Southeast Asia in the form, for example, of "civil Islam" in Indonesia, which is strongly informed by the activities of civil society movements. Robert

example in which the centrality of Islam within the state structure has led to multiple political and cultural negotiations between its Muslim majority and the significant Buddhist minority. Across the border, in Thailand, against the backdrop of the contested history of a significant Malay Muslim presence in the south, the relations between the dominant Buddhist majority and its diverse Muslim minority have recently been subjected to severe strains.

The picture of the inter-civilizational engagements between the multi-faceted (and multi-centered) Islamic world and the so-called West is complicated further by the involvement of East Asian societies. One may quickly recall the historically weighty Muslim presence in China; while the long-established Hui community has adapted creatively to the traditional Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist culture, the recent recrudescence of oppressive measures directed against the Uyghur Muslim population has had a divisive effect on the Islamic world, affecting its unstable relationships with China and the West alike. Less known is the fact that Japan too had no small involvement with the Islamic world during the first half of the twentieth century, when it actively sought political collaboration with Pan-Islamic activists against Anglo-American hegemony, as well as the threat of Russian (and after the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet) expansionism.[7] Such political developments, with their cultural and religious underpinnings, continue to inform, and be informed by, the global discourse on Islam's putative conflict with the West/Christianity. Contextualized in this way, Buddhist-Muslim engagements cannot be regarded as an isolated matter, but should be seen as a non-negligible part of the ongoing global civilizational negotiations.

The second challenge concerns the absence of an adequate analytical framework to study this important topic. This methodological problem stems from the inadequacy of the very notion of religion, modeled after Protestant Christianity, and the analytical categories that have been employed commonly in the study of religion.[8] The so-called world religions paradigm, in which

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W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–20.

7 See also Renée Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

8 The Euro-Christian conceptualization of religion, especially the notion of exclusive religious affiliation and identity, not only affects the study of Buddhist-Muslim engagement, but may even hinder the efforts of inter-religious dialogue on the ground. It has been reported, for example, that the tacit imposition of an exclusive religious identity through the promotion of inter-religious dialogue, often by Christians, exacerbated the communal tension rather than alleviated it. Mark Owen, "A Buddhist Response to the Christian

various religious traditions are reified and attributed fixed characteristics within specific socio-cultural and ideological parameters developed within the Euro-Christian academy, where the discipline of comparative religion took center stage, has been variably criticized in recent years.[9] However, the assumptions inherent in the Euro-Christian conceptualization of religion, which focuses on such factors as the belief in God, the role of the founder and the centrality of scripture, are persisting in spite of the mounting criticisms. What makes this type of scholarly enterprise particularly problematic was that it sealed the sense of superiority on the part of European Christians over their religious others, which manifested itself most blatantly in the so-called civilizing mission formulated at the height of Western colonial hegemony and that particularly targeted the alleged deficits and dangers inherent in Islam as both a religion and a civilization.[10] Not surprisingly, the still common images of Islam as violent aggressors and Buddhists as peaceful and passive victims were established by colonial scholarship.[11]

Furthermore, comparative analyses of Buddhism and Islam have usually been undertaken through binaries that reflect Euro-Christo-centric concerns. These include those between monotheism and atheism or polytheism (or more generally, between theism and non-theism); personal and impersonal, as well as transcendent and immanent, conceptions of ultimate reality; belief and practice; and the Orient and the Occident, or Eastern and Western religions.[12] Applied largely uncritically to non-Christian traditions, these binaries have rendered invisible their specific characteristics as well as the commonalities

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Theology of Religions," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, eds. Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges, and Santhikumar Hettiarachchi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 367.

9 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson, eds., *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies* (London: Routledge, 2016). The critical examination of the use of the term 'religion' in describing different traditions was pioneered by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, most notably in his *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1962). The tendency for 'Western' concepts of religion to be applied to non-Western traditions was already pointed out in the 1950s: Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions in America," in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, eds. Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 22.

10 Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 179–206.

11 This was done by exaggerating the extent of Muslim aggression toward Buddhists on the Indian subcontinent (see Chapter 2).

12 The problem accompanying the use of 'theocentric' categories in comparing Buddhism and Islam will be explored in Chapter 1. For the difficulty in applying the distinction between belief and practice, alongside the concepts of scripture and theology, see below.

that can be found across them. The stark contrasts made through such binaries, coupled with the reified idea of discrete, clear-cut religions, have tended to obscure the internal diversity—both diachronic and synchronic—found within Buddhism and Islam, making opaque potential areas of resonance between Buddhist and Islamic teachings.

Another set of concepts that have a far-reaching impact on our understanding of the internal workings of Buddhist and Islamic teachings derives from the notion of orthodoxy, with its attendant categories such as denominations and sects. The adoption of these concepts may have contributed to the tendency found in the contemporary discourse on inter-religious relations to focus on the differences in official dogma. However, such an approach entails the risk of seriously misrepresenting the ways in which the diversity of interpretations is handled within Buddhism and Islam. Unlike Christianity, within which differences have tended to be problematized on the inter- and intra-religious levels alike, Buddhism and Islam have embraced religious diversity, at least on the formal level, as a natural part of human efforts to apprehend the transcendent.[13] Historically, the idea of orthodoxy, as an officially sanctioned, 'correct' version of the tradition, was largely alien to Buddhism and Islam. Buddhists were certainly engaged in debates on the correct understanding of the Dharma, especially concerning the Vinaya (monastic disciplines), and Muslims on the Qur'an and the *sharīʿah*, with some interpretations more widely accepted than others. Yet these have been considered as variable human attempts at understanding and practicing the correct path. None was given the position to represent or define Buddhism or Islam as a whole, and even where a certain interpretation was deemed mainstream, a significant degree of internal pluralism was maintained.[14] The emergence of new strands within the larger tradition was predicated not so much on credal disagreement as on different approaches to practicing the tradition. Various monastic lineages in Buddhism and schools

13 This may partly be thanks to the general absence of a central institution (or a 'Church') in the history of Buddhism or Islam that would make formal pronouncements on the acceptability of different doctrinal positions. In contemporary Christian theology, however, those with a pluralist stance, who recognize different traditions as equally valid responses to the ultimate reality, tend to be more positive toward difference than most Christian institutions have been. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 5–6; on pluralism see also Chapter 1.

14 On the internal theological pluralism and the absence of "an institutional theological hierarchy" within Islam, see Mohammed Hashas, "Introduction: Islam, Muslims, and Religious Pluralism: Concepts, Scope and Limits," in *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts – Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges*, ed. Mohammed Hashas (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 5, 13.

of jurisprudence in Islam (Ar. *madhhab*, "path") came to be acknowledged as viable alternatives within the respective traditions. They have provided practical guidelines for practitioners, rather than fixed, mutually exclusive markers of identity that categories such as sects and denominations, and even more neutral terms like schools, all too often imply.[15]

For example, the development of the Mahāyāna, which is often portrayed as a rival/alternative sect or school to the Theravāda, initially represented a new vision of the possibility of liberation emerging among practitioners across different monastic lineages. One would fall into a historiographic fallacy if projecting the distinction often made between these labels—as if they were two major mutually exclusive strands in Buddhism—onto the historical picture of how the Buddhist world has been configured. It is only in the twentieth century that the term Theravāda came to be employed by its followers to refer to a group of Buddhists, both monastic and lay, found across South and Southeast Asia, who shared a particular set of texts and practices (rather than just monastics following a specific monastic lineage), thereby coming to be juxtaposed with Mahāyāna as alternative 'schools' of Buddhism.[16]

An even more serious risk of producing conceptual misunderstandings accompanies the conventional view of Sufism. The binary idea of an 'orthodox' or 'mainstream' Islam with a legalistic tendency and Sufism as an inward-looking alternative spirituality is a combined outcome of European Orientalism and the development of various currents of Islamic reformism

15 This does not mean that no strong disputations over doctrinal matters have occurred in Buddhism or Islam. Rather, strenuous attempts to discredit other schools in early Buddhism and violent confrontations such as those that led to the Sunni-Shi'a division as well as those seen among different strands of Buddhism in Japan point to the presence of intra-religious diversity; no central institution was there to formally impose one line of interpretation as orthodoxy and silence all 'dissenting' voices as heretical. The *miḥnah* (inquisition) instituted by Caliph al-Ma'mūn (786–883) would make a rare exception to the general lack of imposition of orthodoxy from above in Islam before contemporary times. Modern nation-states with a Muslim majority, on the other hand, have tended to be much less tolerant of intra-religious diversity. For more insights on intra-Buddhist relations, see Peter Harvey, "Between Controversy and Ecumenism: Intra-Buddhist Relationships," in *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2008), 114–42. A useful recent discussion of Buddhist attitudes to religious diversity is found, for example, in Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Buddhist Accounts of Religious Diversity," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 31:2 (2021), 89–116.

16 For more, see Todd LeRoy Perreira, "Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term," in *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, eds. Peter Skilling, Jason A. Carbine, Claudio Cicuzza, and Santi Pakdeekham (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012), 443–571. The sheer diversity of practices and doctrines that has developed within the Mahāyāna cannot possibly be conveyed by the term 'school,' either.

since the late nineteenth century.[17] The idea of Sufism as an anti-*sharīʿah*, anti-establishment form of Islam has been appropriated by a fraction of Muslims of a Sufi background themselves, reproducing and reinforcing the socially decontextualized idea of Sufism developed in the West.[18] Historically speaking, however, major Sufi teachings were often endorsed by political establishments across Asia and Africa, playing an important role in the Islamization of their territories.[19] Sufi thinking and practice constituted a solidly integral part of most Muslim-majority societies at least up to the high time of Western colonialism in the late nineteenth century, rather than being a peripheral, antinomian, anti-establishment spiritual alternative to 'mainstream' Islam.[20] The roles that Sufi masters played as cultural and social mediators should thus be regarded as integral to the dynamic diversity that Muslims displayed in encountering non-Muslims, and be examined in the broader socio-political contexts in which they operated.

An exploration of Buddhist-Muslim engagements thus provides a fitting opportunity to challenge the methodological imbalance in addressing religious diversity resulting from Eurocentric views and Christian/post-Christian hegemony. In other words, it can greatly encourage the decolonization of the discourse on inter-religious relations and on religion as a whole, which is still "an uneven playing field."[21] As it involves two major non-Christian traditions, a critical examination of the ways in which Buddhist-Muslim relations have been studied elicits the question of what cultural and ideological assumptions have

17 Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 4.

18 The tendency to highlight Sufism as an exclusive bridge between Buddhism and Islam is particularly common among Muslims of a Shiʿa background. For example, see Majid Tehranian, "A Muslim View of Buddhism," in *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2006*, eds. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Lloyd Ridgeon (London: SCM, 2007), 213–24; Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010).

19 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 72–3.

20 Knysh, *Sufism*, 31.

21 Such an imperative has received increasing recognition within Religious Studies, and in the nascent field of Interreligious Studies in particular. Sharada Sugirtharajah, "Introduction: Religious Pluralism – Some Issues," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Sharada Sugirtharajah (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 14; Hans Gustafson, "Introduction," to *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, ed. Hans Gustafson (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 1–2; Kevin Minister, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," in *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, ed. Hans Gustafson (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 157–63.

been at work within the modes of analysis and concepts employed, and how such a methodological framework may have prevented us from understanding Buddhist-Muslim engagements on their own terms. However, this is not to suggest simply castigating and abandoning all traces and influences of Euro-Christo-centric discourse in order to allow for an 'uncontaminated' picture of Buddhist-Muslim engagements to emerge. That would be impossible, given how deeply ingrained Euro-Christo-centric categories are in today's global academia and public discourse. Such an attempt would also further obscure the dynamism of intricate, multi-layered engagements between Buddhists and Muslims, to which Christians have often contributed, whether to a positive or negative effect. To work toward a more comprehensive picture of Buddhist-Muslim engagements requires awareness of how such a Euro-Christo-centric methodological framework continues to affect the phenomenon under study, if under fluctuating circumstances.

2 Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Buddhist-Muslim Engagements

The research on Buddhist-Muslim engagements is still in its infancy, with a few seminal initiatives and publications first appearing around 2010.[22] Most academic works hitherto available on the topic of Buddhism and Islam focus on socio-political aspects, mainly by adopting historical and anthropological perspectives. These include a few pioneering works that have triggered a process of challenging the conventional view of Buddhism and Islam as peaceful and violent respectively, as well as inherently different from each other. Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, which examines the history of Buddhist-Muslim encounters in North India, Central Asia, and China up to the nineteenth century, has so far provided a milestone to scholarship on Buddhist-Muslim relations. Highlighting the dynamism of cross-fertilization and mirroring of socio-political developments between Buddhist and Muslim

22 These include the first international conference on Buddhism and Islam held at McGill University in 2009, entitled "Buddhism and Islam: Encounters, Histories, Dialogue and Representation"; the special issue on Islam and Buddhism, guest-edited by Imtiyaz Yusuf and published in 2010 in *The Muslim World* (100: 2–3), one of the leading academic journals in Islamic studies; as well as two books: Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam* and Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground* which will be discussed below. The topic of Buddhism and Islam was also covered in an earlier conference on "Islam and Tibet: Cultural Interactions," held at the Warburg Institute, London, in 2006.

communities through exploring such topics as idolatry, the concept of *jihād*, and *ḥalāl* food, Elverskog provocatively argues that "rather than being diametrically opposite Buddhism and Islam are actually very much the same."[23] While it is undoubtedly the most innovative and thoroughly researched work on the history of Buddhist-Muslim relations, the parallels the book highlights between the ways in which Buddhism and Islam have developed would not establish their 'sameness.' They rather point to the commonalities between Buddhist and Muslim actors in their responses to various socio-political and cultural circumstances. To demonstrate potential similarities between the two traditions, it is essential to discuss how the purported doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Islam have been perceived by Buddhists and Muslims themselves. Of course, this would also need to include an examination of contemporary developments.[24]

Another important strand of works pertains to the contemporary developments in three Theravāda Buddhist majority societies of Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, where the recent rise of Buddhist nationalism has taken the form of anti-Muslim campaigns among some Buddhists. The most recent is *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World* edited by Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson, whose chapters, representing both anthropological and historical approaches, provide a useful comparative analysis of the Buddhist marginalization of Muslims unfolding in those societies in light of the complex socio-political trajectories of Buddhist-Muslim relations in each country. As it focuses on the specific mode of communal contestation (or Buddhist hostility toward Muslims), however, this type of literature does not always succeed in bringing fully to the fore the complex fluidity of mutual perceptions between the two communities.[25] Such a scholarly trend also reflects the fact that relatively scant attention has been paid to Buddhist-Muslim relations in

23 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 8.

24 Kieko Obuse, "Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road, by Johan Elverskog," *The Muslim World* 104: 1–2 (2014), 230.

25 Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson, eds., *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Other examples include Melissa Crouch, ed., *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016); John Holt, *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities: Religious Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Michael Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury: Religion and Violence in Southern Thailand* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). The ethnographical work on the Thai-Malaysian borderland, where, despite the contested history of the region, interesting phenomena of shared practice between Buddhists and Muslims have long been observed, has a longer trajectory (see Chapter 3).

Muslim-majority countries, such as Malaysia or Indonesia, leaving the picture of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim engagements, especially that in Southeast Asia, rather incomplete.

In addition to the works of history and anthropology (or social sciences in general), a small number of comparative studies of Buddhism and Islam have been produced, mainly by Buddhist and Muslim scholars. The present work calls this type of endeavor Buddhist-Muslim writings (or reflections or discussions, depending on the mode of output), or Buddhist-Muslim theology if it focuses on doctrines from a philosophical-theological viewpoint. Penned from a confessional perspective, these writings explore commonalities between Buddhist and Islamic teachings with a view to promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between the two communities. Many such attempts, however, focus on ethics and/or mysticism as the most fruitful bases of mutual recognition, shying away from discussing doctrines or articulating core faith commitments.[26] Thus, such interventions lack the capacity to provide adequate platforms to help dissolve—or at least reduce—the fundamental mutual suspicion afflicting the two communities.[27] However, the insufficiency of doctrinal discussions in Buddhist-Muslim engagements has been variably addressed in recent years by scholars involved in inter-religious dialogue.[28] The most representative contributors to the nascent Buddhist-Muslim doctrinal dialogue include Alexander Berzin, Imtiyaz Yusuf, and Reza Shah-Kazemi, whose views constitute a major new trend in Buddhist-Muslim engagements, which I call parallelism.[29]

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26 The first known comparative study of Buddhism and Islam with a focus on ethics and morality is Azizun Nahar Islam, *The Nature of Self, Suffering and Salvation: with Special Reference to Buddhism and Islam* (Vohra Publishers & Distributors, 1987). For an example of a work focused on mysticism, see Yousef Daoud, *The Rose and the Lotus: Sufism and Buddhism* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2009). The most extensive contribution along this line is Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Common Grounds between Islam and Buddhism,* which covers a good range of Buddhist teachings, including Mahāyāna philosophies (see Chapter 4). The focus on mysticism may partly be attributed to the presence of comparable practices between Sufi *ṭarīqah*s (brotherhoods) and Buddhist monastic orders, although the extent to which Sufis may have historically borrowed ideas and practices from Buddhists is impossible to determine.

27 Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 194; Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 5.

28 A suggestion that doctrines be fully taken up in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue has been made by a leading inter-religious theologian: Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue: Observations and Suggestions from a Christian Perspective," *The Muslim World* 100: 2–3 (2010), 351–2. In his *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology*, he further explores potential doctrinal bridges between Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

29 The characteristics of parallelist approaches will be explained in Chapter 1. Doctrinal issues are taken up more frequently in works of a polemical nature, perhaps for the

Moving toward the goal of painting a more comprehensive picture of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, the present book builds on, and complements, insights gained from the pioneering works mentioned above, by attending to two areas of integration currently underplayed in the existing literature. The first is the integration, mentioned earlier, of insights from history/social sciences and theological reflections. This step is undertaken through integrating an examination of Buddhist-Muslim discussions into the socio-political narratives of the trajectory of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. It analyzes the former in light of the latter, while also examining the influence that the latter may have on the former. This methodological integration requires a combined examination of both historical and contemporary developments. Moreover, through a close analysis of Buddhist-Muslim writings against their socio-political contexts that include the trends in the global discourse on religion, on both popular and scholarly levels, this step highlights how the above-mentioned Euro-Christo-centric bias has influenced mutual perceptions between Buddhists and Muslims. This includes an in-depth analysis of how some contemporary scholars are making conscious attempts to outgrow them, by exploring alternative methods of relating to their religious others, notably parallelism.[30]

The second step is the integration of the cases of Southeast Asia and East Asia into the larger, ongoing, history of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, which has tended to be restricted to developments on the Indian subcontinent, the classical locus of Buddhist-Muslim encounters, in combination with Central Asia.[31] As discussed later, Southeast Asia and East Asia have staged highly differing modes of engagement between Buddhists and Muslims, each essentially contributing to its global unfolding. Of these, the present work provides in-depth examinations of the cases of Thailand, Malaysia, and Japan. Heeding their specific experiences, it covers a broad range of insider voices expressed within the diverse contexts of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

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purpose of highlighting doctrinal differences, often in the form of a claim on the superiority of Islamic teachings: see, e.g., Imran Nazar Hosein, *Islam and Buddhism in the Modern World* (Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1972), and Harun Yahya, *Islam and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2003).

30 The major challenges to such a categorial straitjacket are found, for example, in the works of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, Shah-Kazemi (both discussed in Chapter 4), and Toshihiko Izutsu (discussed in Chapter 6).

31 For an insightful discussion of the Islamization of Central Asia, including the narratives of conversion from Buddhism, see Devin Deweese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

3 Why Focus on Doctrines?

As pointed out above, the academic literature on Buddhist-Muslim engagements tends to focus on socio-political factors. This is understandable, or even essential, particularly where communal tensions are concerned, as such a focus may help prevent them from further deteriorating into open conflict. Moreover, there is no doubt that socio-political examinations of Buddhist-Muslim engagements contribute to challenging the view that Buddhist-Muslim relations are fundamentally doomed to fail to produce mutual understanding or acceptance due to allegedly essential differences between the two traditions.[32] These contributions are indeed significant as they demonstrate that such communal tensions do not stem from the communities involved following different religions. However, this acknowledgment does not mean that religious teachings and their underlying doctrines have only a secondary role to play in the development of mutual engagements between the two communities. In other words, religious teachings are an essential component of communal issues, given how they are employed and interpreted variably, depending on socio-political and cultural contexts, to develop, support, and reinforce the aspirations and agendas of each community, as well as of specific groups and individual members therein. This is done sometimes to underpin hostile views toward their religious others, and other times to promote attitudes that are highly accommodating.[33] It is this interpretative diversity, or the malleability of teachings, that is found at the heart of the dynamism of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

The relative absence of doctrinal discussions in the literature is attributable primarily to the common perception that Buddhist and Islamic teachings are so radically different that it is impossible to relate the two traditions doctrinally. As mentioned above, it is often suggested, especially in the context of dialogues, that the main focus be placed on mysticism, or Sufism (Ar. *taṣawwuf*) in particular, as well as socio-ethical issues—which makes doctrines a no-go-zone.[34] As will be shown in the present work, however, one can detect

32 Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson, "An Introduction: Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World," in *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, eds. Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 2.

33 As Schmidt-Leukel points out, in conflicts involving people of different religious backgrounds, religion is not simply the victim of political instrumentalization. Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 11.

34 Majid Tehranian, "Response to Berzin," in *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2006*, eds. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Lloyd Ridgeon (London: SCM, 2007), 252; Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*; David Scott, "Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons," *NUMEN* 42 (1995), 152.

an increasing trend of resorting to doctrinal frameworks in Buddhist-Muslim engagements. As we shall see, some actors in the dialogues have argued that it is crucial to address fundamental issues such as the question of God, which is of central importance to Muslims, to facilitate Buddhist-Muslim mutual understanding. In finding parallels between the two traditions, Buddhists often refer to Buddhist notions of ultimate truth, expressed variably as emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*), the Dharma (Pali. Dhamma), Ādi Buddha, the primordial Buddha, or even Buddha Amitābha (Ja. Amida) as worshipped in the Pure Land traditions.[35] Muslims, on the other hand, employ the doctrine of prophethood to accommodate Buddhists by recognizing the historical Buddha as a prophet.

Strictly speaking, moreover, it is impossible to discuss points of resonance between Buddhism and Islam based on mysticism or ethics proper without referring to the fundamental doctrinal tenets which underpin them. They are not self-contained categories or spheres of knowledge/practice. Ethics in Islam cannot be fully understood without referring to the notion of God.[36] Similarly, Buddhist teachings on ideal conduct are presented as a means of achieving enlightenment and can only be fully appreciated within that context. Behind what appears to be the same (or universal) ethical principles lie specific doctrinal frameworks that underscore them. This is also true of mysticism.[37] Sufi teachings are integral to the Islamic tradition in that they are based on, or in conformity with, the Qur'an and the Hadith.[38] The historical corpus on Sufi experience has a strong doctrinal dimension and is often deeply philosophical. Moreover, Sufism has been deeply embedded within Muslim communities, in that major Sufi figures were part of the intellectual mainstream and its doctrines and practice were widely accepted by Muslims across different social strata.[39] Thus, the mystical does not preclude the doctrinal; the claims that

35 The present study uses the Sanskrit term Dharma for the Buddhist expression of ultimate truth, of the principles governing the world, and the way to achieve full awareness of them. Dhamma, the Pali equivalent, which is employed primarily by Theravāda Buddhists, will only be used when discussing their views; see also Chapter 1.

36 Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, "Introduction," to *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism*, by Reza Shah-Kazemi (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), x.

37 There is also contention about the applicability of the term 'mysticism' to Buddhism. Some do not regard meditative absorptions in the Buddhist tradition as mystical experiences. See, e.g., Alexander Berzin, "Response to Tehranian," in *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lecture 2006*, eds. Ridgeon Lloyd and Perry Schmidt-Leukel (London: SCM, 2007), 260. On the other hand, mysticism is one of those terms manifesting the previously mentioned Euro-Christian bias on the fundamental conceptual apparatus used in comparisons and dialogues among religious traditions.

38 Knysh, *Sufism*, 67–9.

39 Ibid., 59–60.

Sufism is the exclusive bridge (or area of resonance) between Buddhism and Islam (as opposed to alleged incommensurability of doctrines proper) or that mysticism should be prioritized over doctrine in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue are operating on the basis of a false dichotomy. Challenging the compartmentalization of a tradition into different, seemingly isolated areas, the present work regards doctrines, broadly understood, as an important factor underlying all engagements and potential bridges—whether they are labeled mystical, ethical, or philosophical—between Buddhism and Islam.

4 Redefining Doctrines and Theologies

In facilitating a more comprehensive analysis of how diversity has operated within Buddhism and Islam, the present book takes mutual perceptions of Buddhists and Muslims broadly as 'theological' statements about the value of the doctrines entertained by their religious other. This approach involves a redefinition of the two key terms of doctrine and theology beyond the parameters set by the specific importance attached to them in Christianity. Simply put, teachings specific to a religious tradition are treated as doctrines, whether they pertain to 'belief' or 'practice,' because such a distinction does not always obtain in Buddhism and Islam. As will be discussed shortly, the stark differentiation between these categories that became normative not only in (particularly Latin Western) Christianity, and in the academic disciplines studying it, would not always obtain. Views predicated on a particular religious worldview, typically informed by core teachings, should therefore be considered doctrinal *thinking*. Theology, on the other hand, is broadly defined as a discussion of ultimate reality. This means that reflections on doctrines will also constitute theologies at large, in that they usually reflect a particular understanding of the ultimate truth. Doctrines do not refer here to fixed dogmas, but to a dynamic process of theological exploration geared toward understanding the ultimate truth within each tradition, with its inherently diverse interpretive possibilities. As they are interpreted and presented variably in their social contexts, theologies are here considered religious discourses, fluid and open-ended.

As pointed out above, theology at large, in its original Christian context, can be understood as an interpretive exercise addressed to sacred scriptures, with ensuing speculative systematizations constituting an indispensable component in the formation of formal doctrines. It is central to the establishment of Christian identity in general, and of formal boundaries between specific churches or denominations in particular. However, the notion of theology does not have exact equivalents in Buddhism or Islam, either in terms of meaning

or importance within the overall tradition. Buddhism is not predicated on divinely revealed sacred scriptures nor on a supreme deity or 'creator.'[40] The core identity of the tradition is determined not so much by the 'correct' interpretation of written texts (i.e., orthodoxy) as it is by 'correct' practice ('orthopraxy' or, more organically, 'wholesome' (Pali. *kusala*) action). Moreover, the content of Buddhist 'orthopraxy' is not fixed, but varies depending on context, as teachings would ideally be adjusted to specific audiences. While this may be true of all traditions to some extent, the point is that what counts as 'standard' Buddhism is much less a matter of credal formulas based on scriptural interpretation than it is in Christianity.

Although it is commonly translated as theology, the Islamic genre of *kalām* is not as central in Muslim interpretation of the divine message as theology is in Christianity, either. Most central to the life of the Muslim community is *fiqh*, jurisprudence.[41] This primarily concerns practice, and its boundaries surpass that of theology in Christianity, in that it covers a wide range of issues, including many that would be otherwise considered as having mundane, if not outright 'secular,' significance. Despite sharing a significant geo-cultural background with Christianity, Islam, in its formation as a tradition, focuses less exclusively on the credal expressions, treating them more as part of the ethico-spiritual path itself. This is exemplified by the fact that the *shahādah*, or profession of faith, is the first item on the list of the five pillars of Islam, thereby constituting the most fundamental 'practice,' and indicating the paramount importance attached to correct action (i.e., acting out one's 'belief') within the Islamic tradition.

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40 Thus, the concept itself of theology as a discourse about God (Gk. *theos*) would be, strictly speaking, almost nonsensical in Buddhism. Some Buddhist scholars, however, have recently made a positive move toward employing the term to mean Buddhist discourse about non-mundane spheres, most notably the Buddha(s) and the Dharma as eternal truths: see Roger R. Jackson and John Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).

41 In Islam, theology has often been subordinated to mysticism. Mystically-inclined Muslims regard it as representing only a limited channel for apprehending ultimate reality, or the Real, as it concentrates on the more rational dimensions of knowledge: Haifaa Jawad, "A Muslim Response to the Christian Theology of Religions," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, eds. Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges, and Santhikumar Hettiarachchi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 354. The underplaying of theology proper is particularly visible among perennialist Muslims, who regard it as confessional, exoteric and exclusivist. Ibid., 346–7.

5 The Production of Difference: Mutual Perceptions as Interpretive Possibilities

As it may have emerged from the foregoing, the notion of 'difference' is key to understanding the dynamics of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, especially on the level of doctrines. In principle, all acts of identity-building are based on perceptions of difference. The creation of the European identity and the idea of a unitary Islamic world in the nineteenth century, or the notions of peaceful polytheists versus intolerant monotheists current in contemporary Japan (see Chapter 6), are examples of such othering processes. What these and the numerous other cases examined in the present book suggest is that difference is produced, not a given. In other words, the idea of what constitutes a difference is heavily contingent on the socio-political contexts in which it is constructed.[42] Not only are differences produced, but they are also constantly negotiated. However, in the short term they may appear static and fixed, often due to their daily reproduction through the mass media. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, a particular religious tradition can be regarded as different from or compatible with one's own, depending on the socio-political ethos of the society, and/or the personal background and agenda of the actors involved. Thus, all perceptions (and representations) of difference, as well as those of compatibility or affinity, are just that: perceptions, or claims, with varying degrees of acceptability, that differ from one social context to another. Whoever claims difference (or compatibility) can invoke extremely sophisticated arguments or intricate interpretations of the relevant texts. While in the case of Buddhism and Islam detailed theological argumentations may have been tendentially employed more for the purpose of demonstrating differences, some contemporary Buddhist and Muslim scholars are making active attempts to create patterns of affinity to counter the conventional discourse of incompatibility between the two traditions (see Chapters 4 and 6).

The importance of acknowledging 'difference' has also been highlighted in postmodern discourses, as will be seen in comparative theologians' critique of the theology of religions (discussed in Chapter 1). Given the autonomous nature of each religious worldview, or language, it is suggested that different religions should not be compared, let alone equated, with others; they should be understood 'in their own terms.' As differences can never be established

42 Frydenlund and Jerryson, "An Introduction," 15; Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson, "Buddhists, Muslims and the Construction of Difference," in *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, eds. Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 278.

objectively and universally, this may threaten to render any comparative enterprises meaningless. In reality, however, comparisons of all sorts continue to be made globally on a daily basis, with new differences being produced (or old differences recycled). While we may disavow the grand objective of the classical comparative study of religion, we need to continue to note the regularity of human acts of comparison, which constitute the basis of 'understanding' or meaning-making. It is the aim of the present work to explore this sensitive and unstable plane on which human beings negotiate their reciprocal reactions, through examining the perceptive diversity found across the long trajectory of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

The present work is a study of religious discourses regarding Buddhism and Islam in their multi-layered contexts. It is not a work of comparative religion, nor of theology. Rather, it engages with theological thinking as a means to explore, identify, and socio-historically contextualize trends in such discourses and the factors contributing to them. While the aim is not to argue prescriptively how Buddhists and Muslims should relate to each other theologically or proceed with dialogues, it will be indicated where relevant if a given view or approach can be theologically fruitful, especially with regard to the development of inclusivist and parallelist approaches (discussed in Chapter 1), as they seem to be the most salient inherent goals of such engagements. Unsurprisingly, any attempt to represent religious diversity has an agenda, a purpose, be it collective or personal, political or spiritual. However, the focus of my discussion is how the individual or the community in question attempts to achieve their goal, rather than scrutinizing their agendas. In this sense, the inherent 'theological' goals of such engagements are deeply imbricated within their socio-political contexts.[43] In examining theologies, therefore, the present work pays special attention to both collective and personal circumstances of the actors involved, in order to bring out the dynamic intertwining of the theological and the socio-political levels and inject a vivid sense of reality into the picture of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

43 The political nature of theology has been variably pointed out, whether in the guise of political theologies or otherwise: see, e.g., Giuseppe Bolotta, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener, eds., *Political Theologies and Development in Asia: Transcendence, Sacrifice, and Aspiration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020). This point is also expressed well by Mohammed Hashas when he says: "Relevant theology is always political; if it is not, then it is irrelevant." Hashas, "Introduction," 25.

6 Buddhist-Muslim Engagements in Southeast Asia and Japan

As pointed out earlier, Buddhist-Muslim relations in Southeast Asia and East Asia have been insufficiently studied, despite being important factors in the unfolding of civilizational engagements and global discourse, involving Buddhist, Muslim, and (post-)Christian majority societies. The case studies of Thailand, Malaysia, and Japan undertaken in the present work have different methodological goals. The discussions on Thailand and Malaysia (provided in Chapters 3 and 4) provide a synchronic comparative analysis of the situations involving Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia, the primary stage of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations. The examination of Japanese experiences (covered in Chapters 5 and 6), in contrast, involves an in-depth diachronic analysis of Japanese approaches to Islam, employing a long-span perspective that stretches from the eighth century right up to the present. The analysis, in each case, focuses on how various ideas of difference (and affinity) are negotiated in response to the transnational and transregional discourse on religious diversity and inter-civilizational relations, as well as the local configurations of communal relations in those societies under highly different historical and socio-political circumstances. Through highlighting the unpredictable dynamism and context-sensitive malleability of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, the present work aims to demonstrate the importance of a multi-regional approach to this increasingly important area of study.

Southeast Asia has a long-standing history of Buddhist-Muslim co-existence and cross-fertilization, with Thailand and Malaysia constituting two major interlocked stages of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in the region. As pointed out above, Buddhist-Muslim relations in Southeast Asia have only started to receive global attention during the past decade or so, mainly due to the surge of anti-Muslim campaigns among some of its Buddhist populations. This alarming trend is threatening to obscure the diverse modes of co-existence and the multi-layered nature of the religious discourse that have been developing across Buddhist and Muslim communities in the region over the years. Thailand, a Buddhist-majority country, has suffered from the so-called 'southern conflict' for decades. Although it is a struggle primarily between Malay Muslim separatists residing in the south and the Thai authorities, the escalation of violence has drastically aggravated the overall communal relations between Buddhists and Muslims in the country in recent years. Against this socio-political backdrop, the common narrative of Muslim destruction of Buddhism in India provides a quite inexhaustible source of Buddhists' distrust and suspicion toward Muslims. Increasingly reinforced by the global wave of Islamophobia, such anti-Muslim sentiment has encouraged some Thai

Buddhists to collaborate with similarly anti-Muslim organizations, such as Ma Ba Tha in Myanmar and Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka. The putative threat of an Islamic expansion has also led to increased endeavors of proselytization by Thai Buddhists.

The Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Malaysia, a country with a significant Buddhist population (the biggest in terms of proportion among those found in the Muslim-majority societies of the region), has witnessed a similarly complex series of socio-political contestations. Over the past few decades, the state-led Islamization policy has created a rather exclusivist ethos among the Malay Muslim majority, affecting the rights of non-Muslim citizens. The consequence has been a politicization of religious identities among the followers of the minority religions, including Buddhists, further reinforcing the ethno-religious divides within Malaysian society. Notwithstanding the fact that inter-religious dialogue is often promoted by the government, its parameters are strictly monitored, with a de facto ban placed on expressions of religious pluralism—a view that all religions constitute equally valid paths toward the one and same ultimate truth. What is particularly intriguing, however, is that, theologically speaking, the presence of such local/communal conundrums has proven to be a 'blessing in disguise,' as they have inspired the adoption of parallelist approaches, whereby the comparability of certain components of different traditions is highlighted, rather than their convergence.[44] This places Southeast Asia at the forefront of doctrinal negotiation in contemporary Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

Japan's engagement with Islam has a much shorter history, and the Muslim presence is still limited in the country. Yet, it has witnessed a significant diversity in the ways in which the Japanese responded to global political crises as well as domestic socio-cultural situations.[45] Japan should be considered a culturally Buddhist society, given the presence of numerous Buddhist temples and religious specialists (as well as lay followers) who identify themselves as such. This is different from a 'Buddhist-majority society,' given that in Japan religious identities are still more fluid than elsewhere, while practices and rituals (often

44 See Chapter 1 for the definitions of pluralism and parallelism.

45 The present work focuses on Japan, rather than both Japan and China, as an example of East Asian manifestation of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. This is primarily because Japan and China, unlike Thailand and Malaysia, have radically different historical trajectories and demographic situations regarding the Muslim presence within their respective borders, which have also translated into different types of involvement with the wider Islamic world. Chinese experiences will however be highlighted when they impact on Japanese perceptions of Islam.

in a family setting) still prevail over exclusive identities and individual affiliations. As mentioned in Chapter 6, Buddhism plays a crucial role in Japanese collective identity, although it represents more a broad cultural heritage than a strictly measurable identity indicator. Indeed, the examination of Japanese perceptions of Islam will also highlight the influence of the indigenous tradition of Shinto, which gradually developed in response to Buddhism in a process characterized by considerable cross-fertilization and tension. Overall, the multi-layered nature of Japanese religiosity has rendered Japanese approaches to Islam highly diverse and interestingly peculiar. For example, Japanese attempts at political collaboration with Muslims worldwide during the first half of the twentieth century were often strongly predicated on the notion of Shinto as a centerpiece of the nation's expansionist agenda. This agenda was developed within the ideological framework developed around state Shinto, a nationally sanctioned system of worship, which was later combined with Pan-Asianist thought developed in the context of counter-hegemonic policies, culminating in the military collision with Western powers during World War II. Thus the earliest Japanese converts to (or, more generally, sympathizers of) Islam before 1945 identified a number of areas in which Islam was considered resonant with Japanese religiosity.[46] This provides a remarkable contrast with the contemporary socio-political ethos, in which Islam is viewed as the distinctive cultural other, or even a threat, within the domestic discourse that draws on the global current of Islamophobic sentiments. Particularly notable is the neo-nationalist cultural eulogization of Japanese religiosity developed in this context, where Japanese religions are actively presented as peaceful forms of polytheism and contrasted with allegedly violent monotheisms (see Chapter 6). Contemporary Japan also deserves special attention as some Japanese scholars have developed highly sophisticated Buddhist-Muslim reflections in a parallelist fashion. While they are certainly rare occurrences if compared with how parallelist views have developed within the context of persistent communal contestation found in Southeast Asia, they play a potentially significant role in challenging the commonly employed framework of comparison based on the monotheism-polytheism divide in Japan, and reflect a global expansion of Buddhist-Muslim reflections centered on parallelism.

46 The present work uses the expression 'Japanese religiosity' to refer to the mainstream religious inclination which reflects various elements drawn from Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, and folk religion, although the boundaries between these are not as clear on the ground as their distinct labels may suggest.

CHAPTER 1

Buddhism and Islam: A Doomed Project?

As pointed out in the Introduction, doctrinal issues have often been regarded as a no-go-zone in Buddhist-Muslim engagements. Islam is based on the belief in one supreme creator God, whereas Buddhism does not postulate such a deity but operates with multiple 'god-like' beings (be they *deva*s, *bodhisattva*s, or Buddhas). The mutual perceptions between Buddhists and Muslims, like their self-perceptions, however, display a startling diversity, far beyond what is suggested by the facile distinction often made between monotheistic Islam and atheistic/polytheistic Buddhism. Before exploring the array of interpretive efforts that has unfolded across the history of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in the subsequent chapters, the present chapter introduces the main analytical categories employed in this book through which to examine mutual perceptions between Buddhists and Muslims. Of particular note is the category of parallelism, introduced here to cover a new line of approach found in contemporary Buddhist-Muslim theological engagements that seeks to valorize mutual reverberations between the two traditions while bypassing theological tensions and political complications.

The discussion of parallelism will be followed by a comparative examination of major concepts and doctrinal tenets of Buddhism and Islam, exploring points of resonance between the conceptions of the ultimate truth and holy/charismatic/saintly beings, as well as how the relationship between them is understood in both traditions. The discussion (1) serves as a first step in the process of challenging such binaries as monotheism versus atheism/polytheism (or theism versus non-theism) and transcendence and immanence which are commonly invoked to highlight the supposed irreconcilable differences between Buddhism and Islam; and (2) constitutes an essential basis for fully appreciating the diverse approaches found in Buddhist-Muslim writings that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.[1]

As the primary aim of this study is to discuss potentially useful tools of doctrinal accommodation between Buddhists and Muslims and to provide the basis for the subsequent discussions in the book, the chapter does not

1 The theism-non-theism distinction is evoked commonly in Buddhist-Muslim writings in contemporary Southeast Asia and beyond (see Chapter 4). The monotheism-polytheism binary, on the other hand, is employed as part of the discourse that is critical of Islam in contemporary Japan (see Chapter 6).

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cover all strands of Buddhism or Islam. The major concepts and doctrines are defined primarily on the basis of early scriptures (the Qur'an for Islam, and the Pali Tipitaka for Buddhism). In the discussion of Islam, the general perspective employed is that of Sunni Islam, with no emphasis placed on any legal or theological school. This perspective includes Sufi approaches, which, as pointed out in the Introduction, constitute an indispensable dimension of mainstream Islamic thought.[2] The discussion of Buddhism draws considerably on Mahāyāna doctrines, which are a development from the ideas expounded in early Buddhism and which have departed from them considerably in some respects. Special mention will also be made of a few schools that have featured prominently in the Buddhist-Muslim reflections covered in the present work, namely the Theravāda, the Sōtō school of Zen, and the Jōdo-shin school of Pure Land Buddhism.

1 Applying the Categories in the Theology of Religions to Buddhist-Muslim Engagements

As a point of departure, the present work employs the perspective of the theology of religions as its main analytical framework in discussing Buddhist-Muslim perceptions, drawing on its classical tri-partite typology, which consists of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (all defined below). The theology of religions, particularly its flagship category of religious pluralism, has been criticized for reducing the particularities of different religious traditions to grand generalizations made on the basis of "a priori judgments informed only by knowledge of [one's] own religion," a charge leveled quite persistently by a few comparative theologians.[3] However, its categories are useful in bringing out

2 Although some of the major Muslim writers discussed in the present work have a Shi'a background, they do not usually bring up specifically Shi'a teachings but actively resort to Sufism, which flourished in both Sunni and Shi'a regions. Although mystical thought and practice tend to be known as *ḥikmah* or *'irfān* in Shi'a Islam, the present work employs the term 'Sufism' to refer to all types of mystical traditions found in Islam.

3 Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 14–5. For a summary of the critique made by James Fredericks, perhaps the staunchest critic of the theology of religions, see James L. Fredericks, "Introduction" to *The New Comparative Theology: Thinking Interreligiously in the 21st Century*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), xiv-xv. It has also been argued that comparative theology is not free from "theological hegemonism," either simply through rejecting the "apriorism [sic.]" and "penchant for abstract theorizing" for which comparative theologians criticize the theology of religions. Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism," in *The New*

the diversity and context-dependent mutability of inter-religious perceptions, whether those found across history and geographical areas or within each individual author. The theology of religions further serves as a useful entry point into our investigation into the ways in which the discourse on religious diversity has been unfolding outside Western societies with a Latin Christian background. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, its classical categories, especially that of religious pluralism, have been appropriated in Southeast Asia in a highly politicized way, functioning as a major label for unacceptable stances among Muslims.

As will be seen shortly, the theology of religions provides a framework or a worldview from which a follower of one tradition can relate to the followers of another. Operating with the definition of 'theologies' set out in the Introduction, the present work applies the categories of the theology of religions to all types of religiously inspired discourses, including works in comparative religion, comparative theology, and inter-religious/intercultural theology.[4] It further examines to what extent its classical typology captures the range of mutual perceptions between Buddhists and Muslims, and how it can be revised to reflect not only their diachronic diversity but also their increasing synchronic fluidity.[5]

The hermeneutical activity called 'the theology of religions' is historically a subject in Christian theology. It was encouraged by increasing awareness within the Christian tradition of the plurality of religions in the modern world, their multifarious variations, and the need to explain the relationship between Christianity and other major religions. There are three major approaches commonly established in the theology of religions: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. They were originally based on the extent of recognition that a particular view gives to the validity of the salvific efficacy of traditions other than one's own. These three stances can be found in all the major religious traditions of the world, adopted in different circumstances by different groups and individuals. In other words, no one tradition can be characterized by just one approach, while a certain approach may be more predominant than others in

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Comparative Theology: Thinking Interreligiously in the 21st Century, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 47. See below for a discussion of possible mutual enrichment between the two approaches.

4 It has indeed been argued that all reflections on other religions involve an implicit theology of religions. Owen, "A Buddhist Response," 362.

5 For earlier attempts to revise and expand this typology, see, e.g., Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010); J. Abraham Veléz de Cea, *The Buddha and Religious Diversity* (London: Routledge, 2013).

one tradition. Similarly, no one individual author can be identified with just one approach; they may take different theological stances over the course of their life trajectories, depending on social, political, and personal contexts.

Exclusivism is the stance consisting in asserting that one's own tradition alone provides the salvific truth. In other words, the followers of the other traditions do not have access to the means to attain salvation. As the present study is focused on the attempts to relate positively to the other tradition, this category, in being dismissive of the paths of other traditions, plays a rather marginal role in the following discussion.[6]

Inclusivism is the approach that avers that, although the salvific truth is found ultimately in one's own tradition, some aspects of this truth are present in other traditions, albeit in incomplete forms. It recognizes some validity in the spiritual paths provided by other religions, but does not regard their teachings as sufficient to attain salvation.[7] Although this focus on the ultimate soteriological efficacy of one's own tradition varies from one inclusivist view to another, they all suggest that their tradition has a unique position amongst various traditions of the world in providing the only true way to salvation.[8] While it may be exclusivist in its implications, this line of thinking is "practically helpful to a community as it becomes more ecumenically minded,"[9] in that it does not compromise the doctrines of the tradition in question nor necessarily ostensibly invalidate other traditions.

Unlike exclusivism and inclusivism, which have long been variably represented in the history of the Christian tradition, pluralism is a more recent view of the religious plurality in the world. With its radically different approach, it has been instrumental in the advancement of the theology of religions as a field of study. The pluralist view rests on the hypothesis that one can differentiate between the Real *an sich*, an infinite divine *noumenon* beyond the grasp of human concepts, and the Real as differently experienced by human beings in different geographical, cultural, and religious settings. This means that all major religions of the world embody different conceptions of, or responses to, the one ultimate reality, and, therefore, their teachings are equally valid and

6 Yet, the term 'exclusivist' may be used analogically to describe dismissive attitudes toward the religious others.

7 Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 1983), 38.

8 For different types of inclusivism, see Ibid., 68; Kristin Beise Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes towards Religious Others* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), Ch. 1.

9 John Hick, "Religious Pluralism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 331.

conducive to salvation; no one tradition is uniquely superior to others.[10] It is to be noted, however, that some contemporary views claiming to be pluralist have an inclusivist kernel.[11] Whether a given proponent of pluralism is aware of this or not, their views represent inclusivism in so far as the concept of ultimate truth is conceived and presented in the language specific to the tradition in question.[12] This suggests that, despite claiming to speak for everybody without pre-judging their views, pluralist perspectives can be just as imposing as inclusivist ones.[13]

Although it is not part of the typology used in the theology of religions, mention also should be made of perennialism, a 'pluralistic' stance adopted by various contemporary religious thinkers, including Muslim scholars.[14] Perennialism is rooted in a belief in a primordial truth or wisdom (*sophia perennis* in Latin) that appeared at the beginning of human existence and has manifested universally in a variety of religions. This truth is thus considered the origin of all religious traditions. Although originally developed within a Catholic milieu with a heavy reliance on Indian Vedanta philosophy,

10 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 233–51. For a useful summary of the pluralist stance, see Alan Race, "Afterword: Persisting with the Typology and Pluralism," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, eds. Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges, and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 385–8. While some treat the typology as a logical one, where the categories are strictly mutually exclusive, I will use it in a more descriptive fashion allowing some overlapping between categories (see below for more). In a logical typology, pluralism means that the salvific truth is found in more than one religion with none being uniquely superior to all others; some provide the complete means to salvation, hence are equally valid, but not necessarily all do. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 18–21.

11 See, e.g., James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 110, 115.

12 Many of the major pluralist views developed by contemporary Muslim scholars, such as Muhammad Arkoun and Mahmoud Ayoub, are inclusivist as they evaluate their religious others in terms of Islamic teachings. Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 329, 344–6; David Thomas, "Islam and the Religious Other," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, eds. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 148–71.

13 Pluralism has been criticized for being a tacit form of "colonialist discourse." Kathryn Tanner, "Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse," *Modern Theology* 9 (1993), 1–18.

14 Prominent examples include Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Among the writers discussed in the present work, Shah-Kazemi is known to hold this stance (see Chapter 4).

perennialism appealed particularly to thinkers involved with Islam.[15] The idea of the universality of religion, expressed commonly by Muslim thinkers of perennialist conviction, has considerable affinity with the Islamic notion of *dīn al-fiṭrah* (to be discussed below) which serves as a basis for the Islamic recognition of other religions. For Muslim perennialists, the universality of religion typically rests on the Islamic notion of *tawḥīd* (oneness of God, also discussed below), which is to be conceived metaphysically and mystically (which explains the popularity of perennialism among Sufi-inclined Muslims).[16] Perennialism, especially in its Islamic expression, differs from pluralism in claiming that the basis of the validity of disparate religions lies in them having been divinely revealed, rather than humanly perceived.[17] However, perennialist views can be essentialist in their understanding of religion. They prioritize searching for commonalities among religions on the metaphysical level (which they regard as "'supra-confessional,' esoteric, and universal"),[18] and regard them as manifestations of the one and same essence. What does not fit this scheme may be dismissed or ranked as lower.[19] Despite often claiming to be universalist, therefore, perennialist views can be inclusivist, in that the efficacy of different religions is evaluated through a particular religion, such as Islam.

While the main agenda of contemporary theology of religions, exemplified by the pluralist view, is the promotion of inter-religious harmony rather than proselytism,[20] opinions are divided over if and how such perspectives of the

15 The type of perennialism adopted by contemporary Muslim thinkers goes back to two European converts to Islam, René Guénon (1886–1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), who developed it under the alternative nomenclature of 'traditionalism.' For the development and scope of traditionalism, see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

16 Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 347.

17 Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006), xxiv.

18 Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 346.

19 Craig Martin, "'Yes, … but …': The Neo-Perennialists," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 29 (2017), 314–7. Despite being 'ahistorical' in their approaches, perennialist thinkers tend to regard the past (or the 'original' form of the religion in question) as a better instantiation of the putative primordial truth. This also fits with some interpretations of the *dīn al-fiṭrah* concept in Islam, whereby the original religion, dispensed through various prophets (to become different religious traditions), has subsequently been corrupted.

20 A good example of such an initiative is found in Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1993).

theology of religions are helpful in achieving its avowed goal.[21] The present work takes the position that such attempts to make doctrinal sense of other religions can help the followers of the tradition in question to cultivate sympathy toward, and a sense of connection with, their religious others. Indeed, some contemporary Buddhists and Muslims are developing their theologies of religions in a way that is either inclusivist or parallelist (to be explained below), to enhance their mutual relations and promote world peace. These ideas are most often directed toward fellow followers of their tradition to proffer potentially conflict-resolving, peace-building perspectives; or, more generally, toward people worldwide in order to promote understanding and appreciation of religious diversity. How successfully such doctrinal perspectives enhance inter-religious relations may, therefore, depend on the basic agenda or intentions accompanying encounters. In order to tell if a certain theological view is detrimental or helpful to inter-religious relations *in reality*, it is imperative to examine how socio-political realities surrounding the encounter in question impact on the process through which a particular theological position is formulated and expressed.[22]

In applying the categories of the theology of religions to Buddhist-Muslim perceptions, the present work employs two major analytical categories: inclusivism and parallelism. It adapts them to best represent stances found among Buddhists' and Muslims' stances toward one another. The inclusion of parallelism as a further category in the commonly employed typology of the theology of religions is deemed necessary because none of the three classic perspectives adequately explains some of the new approaches that have emerged in the context of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

Inclusivism is defined here more broadly than it is in the context of Christian theology, which originally prioritizes salvation. It refers to attempts to recognize major concepts and/or figures of other traditions as valid or valuable

21 Nevertheless, they primarily represent an internal attempt by one religion to define and understand its own religious stance toward others. Shigeru Kamada, "Isurāmu no chi to shūkyōkan taiwa no imi," in *Gurōbaru jidai no shūkyōkan taiwa*, eds. Keiji Hoshikawa and Yukiko Yamanashi (Tokyo: Taishō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2004), 49–50, 72–4. Others do acknowledge that theologies of religions benefit dialogue "at least indirectly": Jacques Waardenburg, "Response to Aydin," in *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lecture 2006*, eds. Lloyd Ridgeon and Perry Schmidt-Leukel (London: SCM, 2007), 55–6.

22 On the importance of recognizing the "interplay between religious beliefs and the concrete inter-religious encounter" in understanding the development of theologies of religions in different traditions, see, e.g., Lloyd Ridgeon and Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Introduction," to *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2006*, eds. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Lloyd Ridgeon (London: SCM, 2007) 2, 9, 8–10.

according to one's own tradition, thereby locating them in one's own worldview.[23] In the present study, inclusivism is most typically used to cover Muslim views of Buddhism wherein the historical Buddha is understood to be one of the Muslim prophets. However, it is also found in a few contemporary Buddhist views.[24] The inclusivist approach, as mentioned above, may involve an exclusivist element: it can be perceived as condescending toward other religions or even detrimental to inter-religious relations if a view is dogmatically imposed upon the followers of other religions. As will be argued below, however, inclusivism is commonly employed by contemporary Buddhists and Muslims with the aim of promoting inter-religious recognition and harmony.[25]

Parallelism, a modification of the category of pluralism mentioned above, refers to a stance geared toward producing a degree of 'affinity' between two traditions by finding similarities between their major concepts or doctrinal tenets, and drawing parallels between them. It is a new theological means of challenging the dominant discourse of religious difference, employed increasingly by contemporary Buddhists and Muslims through focusing on the comparability of their traditions.[26] Parallelism is typically evidenced in the stance of some contemporary Buddhist views which regard Buddhist and Muslim concepts of the ultimate truth as comparable or analogous, without arguing ostensibly that all religions point to the same thing. It is also increasingly used by contemporary Muslim scholars who suggest parallels either on the level of

23 Inclusivism is also defined broadly in Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 5, 9.

24 Major examples of Buddhist inclusivism include the views of the Thai scholar-monk Buddhadasa and the Japanese Zen scholar Masao Abe (see Chapters 4 and 6 respectively).

25 The popularity of inclusivism is also pointed out in Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 2.

26 The definition of parallelism in the present work should be distinguished from that of the same term proposed by Alister McGrath, who employs it to refer to an extreme type of exclusivism. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 462–4. For a useful survey of alternative typologies, see Paul Hedges, "A Reflection on Typologies: Negotiating a Fast-Moving Discussion," in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, eds. Paul Hedges, and Alan Race (London: SCM, 2008), 17–33. The difficulty in applying the classical typology to non-Christian contexts has been pointed out eloquently by Abraham Veléz de Cea, whose research focuses on Buddhist approaches to other religions. While it is beyond the scope of the present book, the distinction he makes between theoretical and practical levels of openness to other religions would be of much use in bringing out the diversity found in the ways in which theological ideas are applied to concrete situations of inter-religious engagements on the ground, where the official stances may be modified or experience subtle shifts. Abraham Veléz de Cea, "Comparative Theology of Religions and the Typology Exclusivisms-Inclusivisms-Pluralisms," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, eds. Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges, and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 29–44.

human spiritual leaders (most typically the Buddha and the Prophet) or on that of the ultimate truth. Their attempts to point out potential points of resonance between Buddhist and Islamic teachings are often motivated by the wish to help fellow religionists overcome the sense of remoteness created by the perceived doctrinal difference between the followers of the two traditions, especially in contexts plagued by communal conflicts. As will be shown in Chapter 4, their efforts tend to be based on a clear socio-political agenda to foster a sense of connection among the followers of the traditions involved and to contribute to the enhancement of their relationship.[27]

While parallelism might seem similar to pluralism in that it seeks to treat different traditions on an equal footing by analyzing their unfoldings in parallel, one salient characteristic that distinguishes parallelists from pluralists is that they often consciously refrain from having 'a final word' on how the concepts they regard as comparable are ultimately related to each other, or whether they refer to the same thing at all.[28] This is precisely why the metaphor of the parallels is particularly suitable for designating this type of argument. Parallelists tend to be cautious not to come across as too judgmental about the other tradition by developing an ostensibly inclusivist or pluralist view although, as will be pointed out below, parallelism may be expressed alongside inclusivist or pluralist views by the same author. In leaving the judgment on these issues open, parallelist approaches can be said to avoid being imposing, not only toward the followers of other religions but also toward the followers of the proponent's own tradition. They leave it up to the listeners or readers to decide (or not to decide) what the parallels may suggest, although their discussions clearly purport to encourage an accommodating and sympathetic attitude toward their religious others.[29]

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27 The present proposal of parallelism as a fourth category is to meet the need to capture the emerging trend specific to Buddhist-Muslim engagements. It is not meant at this point to be a category universally applicable or found in all types of inter-religious theological engagement, particularly Christian-Muslim and Buddhist-Christian. Whether parallelist approaches are found outside Buddhist-Muslim engagements and in what kinds of socio-political contexts they are employed are questions that still need to be explored.

28 Some parallelists do argue for the identification of certain Buddhist and Muslim terms, in drawing various parallels between the teachings of the two traditions. See, e.g., Shah-Kazemi's view in Chapter 4. The term 'pluralism/pluralist' is, therefore, only used when the writer in question clearly regards all major religious traditions as possessing the full salvific truth.

29 Kieko Obuse, "Theology of Religions in the Context of Buddhist-Muslim Relations," in *ASEAN Religious Pluralism: The Challenges of Building a Socio-Cultural Community*, ed. Imtiyaz Yusuf (Bangkok: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014), 80–83.

Parallelism also has the advantage of implicitly discouraging over-theorization, beyond the point where parallels can be drawn between different traditions, about an ultimate truth. It avoids running the risk of overly misrepresenting the core doctrines of the traditions involved, since it does not attempt to fit all the concepts under discussion into one particular worldview, a charge often directed against pluralism.[30] This cautious attitude to making decisive comments about the ultimate truth can also be said to be in line with the idea that the ultimate truth is ineffable, accepted both in Buddhism and Islam.[31]

The most salient characteristic of the parallelist approach is that it is often embraced alongside other positions, such as pluralism and inclusivism, by one single author, depending on the occasion and context. This differs from a change of stance that may take place within a personal trajectory, for example from exclusivism to pluralism. Although it is also possible for one author to shift between two different registers, between inclusivism and pluralism for instance, depending on their audience, the ways in which parallelist views are employed indicate far more clearly the intentional nature of what we may regard as an instance of 'theological fluidity.'[32] In other words, parallelism is not so much a fixed theological conviction or a philosophical stance that one adopts constantly for a certain period of time as the result of a specific socio-theological methodology. At first sight, it may appear as expedient means, employed on an ad-hoc basis, to pursue a socio-political agenda, whenever and wherever necessary and possible. In this sense, parallelism can indeed be regarded as a self-corrective device to the tendency within the theology of religions mentioned above to disregard the social contexts in which theological reflections operate. However, as will be seen in the following chapters, parallelism, when employed by particularly gifted and engaged authors, can acquire deeper contours that make it stand out as an autonomous and consistent approach—and a potentially quite an effective one, at that.

With its attention to specific aspects of the traditions in question and focus away from a value assessment of them or a grand theorization of religious

30 This does not mean that parallelist views always conform to what may be deemed as traditional interpretations of core doctrines of the traditions they discuss. Indeed, some interpretations they develop in drawing parallels between Buddhism and Islam can be dismissed or resisted by other scholars from within their tradition for going 'too far' (see Chapter 4).

31 Especially, the ineffability of the Sufi experiences of *fanā'* or of Buddhist *nirvāṇa* has been variably noted by scholars in relevant fields. See below for these concepts.

32 As discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, major writers who take a parallelist position are either inclusivist or pluralist (or perennialist) in their basic conviction.

diversity, parallelism also bypasses the major criticism leveled against the theology of religions, especially from the perspective of a small polemical segment of comparative theology. Comparative theologians aim at understanding one's own tradition more deeply, and often from a new perspective, through studying another tradition in detail and comparing it to their own. While many comparative theologians are also pluralist theologians of religions and regard the two areas of investigation as complementary,[33] some criticize the theology of religions for assessing other religions on the basis of superficial and limited knowledge of them. This, according to them, ignores the diversity and nuances present within other traditions and produces simplistic generalizations and unfair judgments on their values and truth claims.[34] A particularly significant point of resonance between parallelism and comparative theology is the importance of the choice of parallels, or 'comparables.'[35] The process of comparison in comparative theology "starts with the intuition of an intriguing resemblance," making the choice of topics an "arbitrary and intuitive practice."[36] The motives behind comparison may be different. For comparative theologians, it is to reach a deeper and more creative understanding of their own tradition through comparing certain aspects of it with those of another; for parallelists, it is to provide concrete parallels that serve as an antidote to the psychological distance created by perceived doctrinal differences between the followers of the two traditions in question and so promote mutual understanding and dialogue. Yet in both types of endeavor, careful attention is paid to the objects of comparison or juxtaposition, in order to maximize the chance of achieving their respective theological goals.

2 Two Types of Parallelism

The present book identifies two major forms of parallelism. The first is proto-parallelism, which is most often found in basic attempts of what may be called cultural translation. Typically found among the views produced before

33 Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 29–30.

34 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 8, 10, 14; Fredericks, "Introduction," xiv. Such critics of the theology of religions tend to have an inclusivist attitude toward their religious others. Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 16; Fredericks, "Introduction," xv.

35 On the importance of choice in comparative theology, see Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, eds. Francis X. Clooney and Klaus von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 19–36.

36 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 11.

contemporary periods, it often takes the form of an application of a concept used in one's own tradition to an analogous concept found in another, e.g., viewing Muhammad as a Buddha or the Buddha as a prophet. These views are not based on systematic theological thinking, nor do they involve a detailed discussion as to how the other tradition can be located within one's own, for example, why the Buddha could be regarded as a prophet, or whether the two traditions shared the same notion of ultimate reality. While some may appear as a mild form of inclusivism, many examples of proto-parallelism draw on what may have been an intuitive identification of comparable concepts, i.e., parallels, for reasons of convenience. With few exceptions (e.g., Rashīd al-Dīn or the *han kitab* tradition in China, discussed in Chapter 2), proto-parallelism does not usually involve a specific socio-political or theological agenda. In not exhibiting a clear-cut purpose but usually drawing on the (often limited) knowledge and intuition of the actors, some examples of proto-parallelism may be regarded as confusion, misunderstanding, or even 'unintentional misrepresentation.' Yet, they can also be a sign of potential acceptance or a token of theological negotiation. Such views deriving from historical records thus have significant implications for contemporary theological endeavors. Rather than dismissing intuitive attempts to find parallels simply as a misunderstanding, the concept of proto-parallelism can encourage viewing those early reflections as suggesting potential areas of theological exploration, where the boundaries between misrepresentations and interpretations can become ever more porous.

The second is 'conscious' parallelism, where the act of paralleling is performed more intentionally, and to a socio-political and/or philosophical end. This type of parallelism is typically found in contemporary contexts. As mentioned earlier, one notable characteristic of this type of parallelism is that the proponent of the given view often holds either a pluralist or inclusivist stance as their default philosophical/theological position, but chooses to employ a parallelist approach when this is deemed necessary and more efficient, politically or theologically.[37] The majority of examples discussed in the present work, i.e., Alexander Berzin, Imtiyaz Yusuf, Reza Shah-Kazemi (all discussed in Chapter 4), and Rikyū Kono (to be taken up in Chapter 6), represent socio-politically inspired parallelism; their decision to take a parallelist stance is motivated by the socio-political realities surrounding Buddhist-Muslim engagements, whether they are mutual perceptions on the ground or

37 It is also possible that a move toward parallelism, as seen in the example of Yusuf, may reflect the awareness of the hegemonic nature of pluralism, rather than simply opting for a convenient choice in the spirit of socio-political realism.

the trend of the existing scholarly discourse. By developing parallelist views, they seek to produce affinity between Buddhism and Islam to challenge/manipulate the dominant discourse that tends to over-highlight the irreconcilability of Buddhism and Islam. While their approaches display some spirit of socio-political realism, their recourse to parallelism cannot be reduced to instrumentalism, as their discussions show a capacity to capture theological affinities, especially in the case of Shah-Kazemi. The work of Toshihiko Izutsu (discussed in Chapter 6), on the other hand, employs a more deeply philosophical parallelism, presented as a consistent method of analysis. Although Izutsu seemingly operates in a context removed from the socio-political reality of inter-religious contestation that other parallelists deal with, his commitment to exploring an alternative way to bring out the structural similarities found in different modes of experiencing and describing ultimate reality, thereby pointing to their possible convergence, shares with them the parallelist urge to present a credible alternative to the dominant discourse of difference, which emphasizes the putative incommensurability between Buddhism and Islam, and to open up an inter-religious hermeneutical space allowing a variety of interpretations to unfold.

3 Key Concepts and Doctrines of Buddhism and Islam

Although the theology of religions originated within Christian theology, its categories have been taken up by non-Christian scholars. This includes both Muslim and Buddhist 'theologians,' some of whom have been engaged in this hermeneutical exercise in collaboration or dialogue with their Christian colleagues.[38] As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the Buddhist and Muslim approaches to this enterprise vary considerably due to how the major doctrines of the two traditions are interpreted. The following discussion introduces key doctrines and concepts relevant to the discussion of Buddhist-Muslim mutual perceptions and discourses. It first discusses the Muslim doctrine of prophethood (Ar. *nubuwwah*) in relation to the concept of *dīn al-fiṭrah*, which, according to Islam, is the origin of all religious traditions. This doctrine tends to serve as a basis of an inclusivist framework, often in combination with a Sufi-inflected view of religious diversity to allow for a more pluralistic perspective.[39] Furthermore, the Buddhist concept of emptiness is discussed together

38 Ridgeon and Schmidt-Leukel, "Introduction," 1.

39 For the contribution of Sufi perspectives to pluralistic Islamic theologies of religions, see Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 48–52.

with the *trikāya* (three-body) theory, both emphasized particularly in the Mahāyāna, providing a foundation for various manifestations of ultimate reality in Buddhism. As such, it may be seen to lead to inclusivism or parallelism. In addition to analyzing how these doctrinal frameworks could be applied in the Buddhist-Muslim context, the section also examines how major concepts of the two traditions may be compared, discussing potential parallels between Buddhist and Muslim worldviews.

3.1 *Prophethood and God in Islam*

Since Islam arose in a multi-religious environment and coexisted with Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians during its formative period, it had from the start an acute awareness of the existence (and the need to deal with) other religious traditions.[40] This is seen in the passages of the Qur'an that provide the basis for a doctrinal framework within which Muslims can relate to the followers of non-Islamic traditions. God and prophethood are the concepts most fundamental to the Islamic worldview. The doctrine of prophethood explains how the message of God (i.e., revelation) is conveyed to humanity, providing the main foundation for Muslim recognition of other religions. It is closely related to the idea of *dīn al-fiṭrah*, the original religion. It accounts for non-Muslim peoples' sharing in the message of *islām*, which was transmitted by various prophets.[41]

Prophets are individuals who receive revelation from God and a mission to propagate it among their peoples. Although viewed as extremely virtuous and morally impeccable, they are considered mortals and not divine.[42] With their special intellectual faculty and imagination, they present God's message, otherwise incomprehensible to ordinary people, through symbols and metaphors that are intelligible to them.[43] According to the Qur'an (e.g., 10: 47, 16: 36, 35: 24), every nation has had a prophet (or messenger) sent to them from Adam

40 Thomas, "Islam and the Religious Other," 148–9. Amir Hussain, "Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith Dialogue," in *Progressive Muslims: Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 252.

41 The present work makes a distinction between Islam and *islām*. The former refers to the institutionalized tradition of Islam, and the latter to the content of *dīn al-fiṭrah*, which predates the coming of Prophet Muhammad. This distinction has been made by a few contemporary Muslim scholars. Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 43–4. See below for major examples.

42 Some prophets (sing. Ar. *nabī*) are also messengers (sing. Ar. *rasūl*). Messengers are of more elevated status than prophets in that they bring forth a divinely inspired 'book.'

43 Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 38–40.

to Muhammad, the first and the last in the chain of prophethood respectively. There will be no more prophets after Muhammad, who came with a special universal mission, in contrast to previous prophets such as Jesus (Ar. *ʿĪsā*), who served their own peoples only. While twenty-five prophets are named in the Qur'an, many others are left unspecified. While many of the named prophets preceding Muhammad are biblical figures, the unnamed prophets are believed to include non-Israelite figures. The exact number of these unnamed prophets is not established, ranging between a few thousand to as many as 124,000.[44]

The chief task of prophets is to remind humanity of *tawḥīd,* the oneness of God. They are to rectify the ways of their people and guide them to the right path of worshipping the one true God. In Islam, this role shared by all prophets is closely rooted in the previously mentioned concept of *dīn al-fiṭrah*. *Fiṭrah*, as it appears in the Qur'an (30:30), refers to the natural inclination present in all human beings to embrace *tawḥīd*.[45] All humans are considered to have been born in the state of *fiṭrah*, hence as *muslim*s, yet some have become alienated from their inborn religious inclination, taking up wrong beliefs and practices over the course of their lives. Therefore, *dīn al-fiṭrah*, the religion of *tawḥīd*, is also intended as the source and basis of different religious traditions. The teaching of *islām*, surrender to the one and only God, is exemplified in its most complete form in Islam (or it *is* Islam) as the institutionalized religion of the Prophet. Hence, all other religions are derivative of *islām*, having retained only a part of that essence (i.e., *tawḥīd*) corrupted over the course of time.[46]

In other words, the revelations given to different prophets became different religious traditions containing varying degrees of the ultimate truth. These prophets teach, or 'allegorize,' this truth in ways that are most suitable to their local cultures. While some teachings are closer to the ultimate truth than others, none of them "represent the *naked* truth since it is ever prone to symbolization by association of images."[47] This suggests that, while all prophets

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44 124,000 is given in the *Musnad* by Ibn Ḥanbal, 5: 169.

45 Yasien Mohamed, *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 16–7, 85.

46 Ibid., 14, 22f; Ismail R. al-Faruqi, "Islam and Other Faiths," in *The Challenge of Islam*, ed. Altaf Gauhar (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), 94. However, some contemporary scholars have argued for the possibility of *fiṭrah* being upheld, and *islām* practiced, fully in other religions. See, for example, Mahmut Aydin, "Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths," in *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2006*, eds. Lloyd Ridgeon and Perry Schmidt-Leukel (London: SCM, 2007), 41f; Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Islam and Pluralism," *Encounters* 3: 2 (1997), 114–5; Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16, 206.

47 Rahman, *Prophecy*, 39, 41–2.

convey the message of *tawḥīd*, their teachings have different levels of validity as sacred truth, dependent on the receptivity of the cultures they are expressed in and methods by which their associated prophets made it intelligible. That some prophetic messages have less 'merit' than others, it is further argued by classical philosophers, is not because the prophets in question are less capable than their counterparts in other cultures, but because a full-fledged message of *tawḥīd* was less appropriate in their contexts.[48]

God (Ar. *allāh*) is ultimate reality in Islam. He is the creator and the source of revelations that are disseminated by various prophets. Though completely transcendent and thoroughly omnipotent, God is Being and therefore 'exists,' albeit on a completely different level from that of human beings.

In terms of His nature, God's essence (Ar. *al-dhāt*) is considered in Islamic theology to be beyond human understanding and 'hidden' from human beings, whereas His attributes (sing. Ar. *sifah*) can be known to them through the scriptures. While different theological schools emphasize this distinction between the unknown and known aspects of God differently, it is primarily through the latter that Muslims perceive and praise their Lord.[49] The conventional list of God's attributes (or divine names) numbers 99, although they are by no means limited to this number. Allah, the Arabic term for God, is the highest amongst the names, possessing a special place among them, yet is but one name for the Real (Ar. *al-ḥaqq*), which ultimately is not to be limited by 'naming.'[50] Therefore, strictly speaking, it is not identical to the Real itself, but is merely one of the human ways of understanding Him (or perhaps better It). In theological discussions, however, the term God is typically used for the Real including both Its known and unknown aspects.

Among the known aspects of God, His mercy is given paramount importance. This can be seen in the *basmalah*, the Muslim credal formula, which describes Him as "the merciful and compassionate" (Ar. *al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*). These two terms share a triliteral root *ra-ḥa-ma*, which denotes mercy but also a womb, providing a maternal connotation to God's mercy and compassion.

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48 Ibid., 41–2.

49 The Mu'tazilites place a strong focus on the unknowability of God, while the Ash'arites tend to take anthropomorphism more literally. Some Muslims suggest that the notion of divine ineffability can provide a basis for pluralism (or a Muslim acceptance of non-Islamic traditions). See, e.g., Mahmut Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist: Jalaluddin Rûmi," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Exploration of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 222–3.

50 Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam," in his *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), 24.

Also important are God's attributes as the creator (*al-khāliq*)/judge (*al-ḥakīm*, wise, and *al-ʿādil*, just), and His oneness (*al-aḥad*). God's creation is considered to be an ongoing process rather than one single event at the beginning of time. It is willed for the sake of humanity, that is, in order for them to know Him; other creatures are therefore created for the sake of human beings. He not only causes all human actions, including evil and unbelief, but also judges human beings for their actions on Judgment Day and sentences them either to Heaven or Hell accordingly.

Regarding *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God, this concept of absolute monotheism is often expressed in terms of God having no partners in being the ultimate source of everything in the universe. Nothing is related to Him or shares His power. In the Qur'an, this statement is generally found in the context of condemning pre-Islamic practices such as idol worship and polytheism and the Christian recognition of Jesus as the incarnation of God (17: 111).[51] As mentioned above, such acts of *shirk* (associating other entities to God) are considered to be digressions from *dīn al-fiṭrah*, the original universal religion based on faith in one God.[52] It is usually this belief in the oneness of God, along with the denunciation of idol worship found in the Qur'an, that underlies the contemporary Muslim critique of perceived idol worship among Buddhists.

One can find a number of highly concrete personified expressions used for God's attributes in the Islamic scriptural sources. For example, God is described in the Qur'an as having a face, eyes, and hands and as sitting on a throne.[53] This suggests that human beings, like Prophet Muhammad, can have a vision of God (Ar. *ruʾyat allāh*). While interpretations of such passages vary amongst scholars, it is perhaps useful to be reminded that such anthropomorphic expressions may be considered an expedient means to communicate the ultimate truth. The divine essence is allegorized for ordinary people, since they are not fully equipped to grasp it as it is. It would be too difficult for ordinary human beings to understand in its genuine form. They might fall into the trap of thinking it a 'nonentity' if it were not communicated through symbols and imagery.[54]

While God the creator in Islam is generally considered to be wholly different from human beings, who are His creatures, this distinction can be blurred if God is considered to be ultimate reality itself, the pure realm of

51 The passages from 112: 1–4 are also a direct refutation of this Christian doctrine.

52 This is also called *al-ḥanīfiyya*, whose model is provided by Abraham.

53 For example, He is said to have mounted on the throne in the Qur'an (57: 4).

54 Rahman, *Prophecy*, 42.

Existence/Being.[55] The entire universe, with all the phenomena unfolding in it, is not only created by God as an external force but shares in His essence, or *is* God, although ordinary human beings do not perceive this. This view is expressed most notably in the so-called philosophy of the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī.[56] Such oneness with God is realized in the experience of *fanā'*. *Fanā'* literally means 'annihilation' of a person, or of one's own ego-consciousness, through the realization of unity with God, the Absolute. This is a mystical state attainable, for example, through contemplation on God's attributes. In this state, most typically, one is considered to observe God and nothing else, and to ultimately lose even a perception of witnessing God as a subject, thereby realizing a complete disappearance of the subject-object distinction (*fanā' al-fanā'*). Theologically, this union is still called *tawḥīd*, which literally means "making many things one."[57] *Fanā'* is followed by the state of *baqā'*, an even higher spiritual state in which the mystic's perception regains the subject-object distinction (or self-awareness), allowing them to operate in ordinary settings while remaining fully aware of the unity of Being.[58] *Baqā'* is a particularly important concept in capturing potential resonance between Buddhist and Islamic experiences of ultimate reality. One might argue that *nirvāṇa*, or enlightenment (namely, perfect awareness of the way things are which brings about the ability to act meticulously and compassionately in any situation), accompanies what could correspond to *baqā'* as well as *fanā'*.[59] The

55 The notion of God, or ultimate reality, as the 'wholly Other' is in itself a product of Euro-Christian theological thinking, which has also been applied to non-Christian traditions. Yoshitsugu Sawai, *Rūdorufu Ottō: shūkyōgaku no genten* (Tokyo: Keiōgijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2019), Ch. 6.

56 This type of unitive view of the phenomenal world was prefigured by al-Ghazali (see Knysh, *Sufism*, 81), whose work has also been quoted often by contemporary writers with Sufi inclinations.

57 Izutsu, "The Basic Structure," 8–9.

58 Kazuyo Murata, "Fana and Baqa," *Oxford Bibliographies in Islamic Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) [n.p.]. It is also notable that not all Muslim mystics experience *baqā'*, but the experience is mostly limited to those who carry out prophetic activities. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North California Press, 1975), 143–4.

59 Some of the major Western scholars of Sufism have understood *fanā'* as a higher level of spirituality, or fuller experience, than *nirvāṇa*, seeing the latter in a negative light, as something completely devoid of an actively enacted spiritual state comparable to *baqā'*: see, e.g., Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1914, 1963), 18, 149; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 310; Gerhard Böwering, "*fanā'* and *baqā'*," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Jawid Mojaddedi, "Annihilation and Abiding in God," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3rd ed., eds. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2002–). However, the annihilation of

post-*nirvāṇa* quality of mind and *baqā'* can both be seen to represent a state in which one lives out an awareness of the ultimate truth and guides other beings on one's spiritual path.[60] The oneness of all things in God, emphasized in Islamic mystical traditions, points furthermore to the interdependence of all things, which constitutes the central teaching in Buddhism, expressed in such concepts as dependent origination and emptiness.[61]

Those who achieve this state of oneness, typically saints (sing. Ar. *walī*) and prophets, are considered as completely free of their ego-consciousness. Thus, they reflect God's Face, i.e., ultimate reality, like a mirror.[62] Possessing a perfect knowledge of the ultimate truth, and embodying it, such holy beings acquire the traits of the Perfect Man (Ar. *al-insān al-kāmil*).[63] With Prophet Muhammad being the paradigmatic example, the quality possessed and displayed by such spiritually perfected figures is further called the Muhammadan reality (Ar. *al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadīyah*) or the light of Muhammad (Ar. *al-nūr al-muḥammadi*).[64] This line of definition of the highest spiritual attainment in Islam would strongly qualify the rigid understanding of ultimate reality as absolutely transcendent, another category typically employed to describe the Islamic notion of God. In blurring the distinction between the ultimate truth

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individuality or ego-consciousness is by no means reducible to inactivity, as can be seen in the case of the historical Buddha, who fully lived and taught the Dharma for 45 years after his enlightenment.

60 See, e.g., Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 51f. For a discussion of the parallel structure of Sufi and Zen Buddhist spiritual experiences, see Izutsu, "The Basic Structure," 9–10; Mehrdad Massoudi, "Zen Buddhism and Sufism: An Interreligious Encounter," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 19–1 (2009), 118. More recently, the "active asceticism" of *bodhisattva*s in their post-enlightenment states is likened by Hina Khalid to the state of *baqā'* experienced by Sufi saints, whose prototype is found in Muhammad's "return to humanity" from his ascension into heaven (Ar. *mi'rāj*): Hina Khalid, "Spiritual Death as Reorientation and Revival: Comparative Reflection on Śūnyatā in Mahāyāna Buddhism and Fanā in Sufism," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 68 (2020), 64, 72. For an analysis of parallel structures whereby after the practitioners "return" to the mundane sphere to assist their fellow beings after their ego-consciousness disappears and realize the ultimate truth through the practice of *dhikr* and *nenbutsu* in Ibn al-'Arabī and Shinran's thought respectively, see Elif Emirahmetoglu, "Ibn al-'Arabī and Shinran Shonin on Invocation and Realization," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 70 (2021), 71–101. For Shinran, see below.

61 Cleary, "Buddhism and Islam," 33–4.

62 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 72, 75, 111.

63 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 264–5.

64 Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 236–8, 268. See also William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), Ch. 2.

and human realizers of it, it can be regarded as analogous to the Buddhist idea of human beings (or all sentient beings for that matter) having the potential to become a Buddha through eliminating their ego-consciousness and seeing things as they really are. At this stage, one not only realizes but also embodies the Real, which, as discussed below, is variably called *nirvāṇa*, the Dharma, emptiness, or the Buddha (in terms of the qualities represented by all those who have attained Buddhahood/enlightenment).[65] In Mahāyāna Buddhism, moreover, the possibility of enlightenment is predicated on the Buddha nature, inherent in all beings, which is comparable to the above-mentioned Muhammadan reality.[66] Here the monotheism-polytheism binary (as well as the transcendent-immanent binary) often employed to describe Islam and Buddhism as contrastive terms would be compromised considerably.[67]

3.2 *Bodhisattva and Emptiness as the Dharmakāya*

Although the historical Buddha, Gautama Siddhārtha (Pali. Gotama Siddhattha, aka Śākyamuni, the sage of the Śākya clan), dealt at length with the followers of other Indian traditions, such as Hindus and Jains, early Buddhist literature does not set out a general doctrinal framework from within which Buddhists should relate to non-Buddhist traditions, unlike its Muslim counterpart.[68] The

65 The importance of the parallels between Buddhism and Islam concerning the relationship between ultimate reality and saintly beings who realize it cannot be overstated. As will be mentioned below, they open up the possibility for Muslims to relate positively to the Buddhist veneration of Buddha images as a reminder of the ultimate. For a summary of this point with reference to Shah-Kazemi's 2010 work, see Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 197–9.

66 Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Nexus of Ontological Events: A Buddhist View of Reality" in his *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy: Collected Papers of the Eranos Conference*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2008), 170–71. Similar parallels have also been suggested by Yusuf and Shah-Kazemi (see Chapter 4).

67 The reconsideration of the monotheism-polytheism binary has also been suggested based on ethnographic observations that the ascription of some degree of sacredness to certain people, things, and places is an inevitable dimension of so-called monotheistic religions: Tatsurō Futatsuyama, "Sekai wa kami to tsunagaru mono ni afureteiru: materiaritī to isurāmu," in *Chūtō isurāmu sekai eno 30 no tobira*, eds. Tetsuo Nishio and Yasushi Tōnaga (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2021), 137–8.

68 The Buddha is considered to have recognized the possibility that a non-Buddhist teaching could lead to enlightenment, provided its path contains the right factors. Peter Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 59. A similarly inclusivist interpretation is also provided by K. N. Jayatilleke, who denies that the Buddha "has a monopoly of the truth," suggesting that "aspects of the truth or even the whole truth" can be discovered by others, presumably, including 'non-Buddhists.' K. N. Jayatilleke, *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975, 2006), 26.

Buddha's teachings were geared toward the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, with those who have accomplished this called *arhats*.[69] *Nirvāṇa* is said to be a cessation of suffering and freedom from rebirth, which is attained through extinguishing one's desires (Pali. *taṇhā*); it is an awakening (*bodhi*) to the way things are. The nature of *nirvāṇa* is considered utterly inexpressible, often described as an experience of sheer bliss and serenity or in terms of 'what it is not.'[70] Unlike *saṃsāra*, the realm of rebirth where everything is impermanent and subject to decay, *nirvāṇa* is the only state of permanence in Buddhism. Enlightenment, which is basically synonymous to *nirvāṇa*, is a concept focused more on this latter cognitive element. *Satori*, on the other hand, is a term particular to Zen Buddhism, which denotes an intuitive awareness of (or awakening to) the nature of things, particularly one's own Buddha nature, entailing that all beings are inherently enlightened.[71] Whether one takes the perspective of early or Theravāda Buddhism or that of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Buddhist notion of ultimate reality is predicated on the recognition that human beings possess the potential to realize and embody it, through becoming enlightened or bringing into active life the enlightened nature that is latent within themselves.

The *bodhisattva* ideal provides a means to recognize a range of spiritually advanced human beings who have a clear social role to guide and benefit others. In the Buddhist context, their goal is to assist other sentient beings in attaining enlightenment, the state of full awareness of the way things are. This highest truth (Skt. *dharma*) is philosophically expressed through the Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings on emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*). However, unlike the Muslim doctrine of prophethood, the Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal was not originally an explanatory principle for the non-Buddhist traditions and their leaders. While the term *bodhisattva* (Pali. *bodhisatta*) was present in early Buddhist literature, the *bodhisattva* ideal was developed at a later stage and rose to prominence in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Bodhisattvahood is, therefore, not comparable to the prominence accorded to prophethood in the Qur'an.[72]

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69 An *arhat* (Pali. *arahant*) refers to a person who has attained the transcendent state of enlightenment. They receive particular veneration within the Theravāda tradition for achieving the highest spiritual qualities.

70 *Udāna* 8: 3. However, the description of *nirvāṇa* via negations does not mean that it is simply a negative experience.

71 However, this moment of *satori*, which has been experienced by numerous practitioners, sometimes multiple times, is not identical to *nirvāṇa*. Enlightenment as per *nirvāṇa* is the complete freedom from *saṃsāra*, the realm of rebirth characterized by suffering, which, as the Buddhist tradition holds, is considered rarely possible in today's world.

72 Although the doctrine was developed much later than his lifetime, the historical Buddha is depicted to represent a prototype of such *bodhisattva* figures in early scriptures: Har

A *bodhisattva* is a human being who takes a vow to become a Buddha to help other sentient beings attain liberation (from *saṃsāra*) as well as well-being in this life. A *bodhisattva* can also be a fully awakened Buddha, who, with knowledge of the ultimate truth (*bodhi*, or *samyakasambodhi*, perfect awakening) and powers, assists beings in suffering. Driven by great compassion, *bodhisattva*s practice the six (or according to some scriptures, ten) *pāramitā*s (perfections): generosity, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and intuitive wisdom in order to achieve a perfect awakening.[73] As an ideal that arose in reaction to the tendency of *arhat*s (or *śrāvaka*s, 'listeners') and *pratyekabuddha*s (Pali. *paccekabuddha*s, 'solitary Buddhas'), who were then considered to be only concerned with their own *nirvāṇa*, the main emphasis of the *bodhisattva* doctrine is on the person's intention to actively and compassionately engage in helping others.[74] As a *bodhisattva* seeks Buddhahood to have all the powers and omniscience needed to best assist others, advanced *bodhisattva*s are practically 'ready' and equipped with the qualities of a Buddha, and so can act appropriately in any situation. Using skillful means (Skt. *upāya-kauśalya*), they guide people toward enlightenment in the ways most suitable for them.[75]

Given that some are to be Buddhas when, theoretically speaking, all sentient beings have attained enlightenment, the list of *bodhisattva*s tends to overlap with that of Buddhas. Though there is no knowing how many of such Buddha-to-be figures have been or are around, it is believed that there is only one historical Buddha appearing in any one specific time, when the knowledge of the timeless Dharma (Pali. Dhamma) has been lost, in order to restore it.[76]

An early list of the historical Buddhas mentions those who existed prior to the Buddha Śākyamuni, as well as Maitreya, the future Buddha, who is yet to appear. While Maitreya, strictly speaking, is a *bodhisattva* and not yet a Buddha, he is often referred to as a Buddha in anticipation. In addition to those on the list, it is also sometimes held in Mahāyāna Buddhism that there are Buddhas in the innumerable world systems of the 'ten directions,' currently teaching and guiding sentient beings. There are also celestial Buddhas who created their own lands, some of whom are widely venerated in certain Buddhist cultures. Of particular relevance to the present study is Buddha Amitābha ("One of the

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Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, 1932), 43, 292f.

73 Peter Harvey, "Portrayals of Ultimate Reality and of Holy and Divine Beings," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 110.

74 Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 9–19, 50.

75 For skillful means, see the next section.

76 Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 5.

Infinite Light," Ja. Amida), who is believed to reside in a distant Western paradise called Sukhāvatī, and to be a manifestation of the truth with a salfivic power.[77] Avalokiteśvara ("The Lord of the World," Ch. Guanyin), a *bodhisattva* of compassion, is also highly popular in East and Central Asia. This figure, who manifests in both male and female forms, is believed to appear at times on earth in response to the pain and suffering of sentient beings.[78]

Emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*) is a term designating the absence of inherent nature (Skt. *svabhāva*) in all phenomena. It is often regarded as the nature of ultimate reality by Mahāyāna Buddhists. Although it is not meant specifically as a conceptual tool to account for other religions, emptiness, as in the related *trikāya* (three-body) doctrine, can be seen to have some relevance for key concepts and figures found in non-Buddhist traditions, providing a framework for locating them in a Buddhist worldview.

Concepts of emptiness featured prominently in the Perfection of Wisdom (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitā*) literature, and were further developed and elaborated by Nāgārjuna, the second-century Indian scholar. Such philosophical viewpoints are most intimately related to the principle of dependent origination (Pali. *paticcasamutpada* Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*) and to concepts of impermanence (Pali. *anicca* Skt. *anitya*) and no-self (Pali. *anattā* Skt. *anātman*).[79] These are presented in the early Buddhist literature as the Dharma, which is expounded as the Four Noble Truths of suffering, its causes, deliverance, and the path to the deliverance from suffering.[80] They are also presented more succinctly as the teaching of the Middle Way. In terms of practice, it refers to the avoidance of the two extremes of hedonism and asceticism, and in terms of ontology, of eternalism and annihilationism. The notion of no-self is nothing but an expression of the latter; things do not exist in themselves but are not non-existent either. Emptiness, therefore, is the way things are, the 'true nature of things,' expressed in the most radical fashion. Yet, as it refers to the interdependence and impermanence of all things, emptiness fundamentally defies definition. It is not a thing or an entity, or a place or a state of mind, or some kind of mysterious being. It is not "the Ultimate Truth in the sense that it is

77 The position of such Buddhas in the Buddhist worldview is explained by the doctrine of *trikāya*. See the next section.

78 At present, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is considered to be a reincarnation of Avalokiteśvara. In East Asia, most typically in China, the same *bodhisattva* tends to be worshipped as a female figure.

79 Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville, NY: Abingdon Press, 1967), 58f.

80 Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, revised ed. (London: Wisdom Book, 1959, 1990), 16f.

an ultimately existing or inherently existing entity."[81] At best, emptiness is an analytical concept devised to describe the way of things on the ultimate plane, as opposed to the reality perceived on the conventional level, i.e., as consisting of separate and independently existing phenomena (or things) considered as inherently existent.[82]

Thus, emptiness is to be realized directly through meditative experience, rather than to be understood merely intellectually. Its realization has soteriological importance; when one realizes "this saving knowledge" of the way things are, one can become enlightened and free.[83] As a means to realize the spiritual goal of attaining enlightenment, or liberation, the teaching on emptiness finds practical expression in the concept of skillful means (often referred to simply as *upāya*, Ja. *hōben*). This important Mahāyāna concept features prominently in the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*). It encourages different methods and representations (such as words) to be employed, dependent upon context. There is not a single authoritative method or way to realize the Dharma or to become enlightened.[84]

The concept of skillful means is often employed in an inter-religious context to show that the Buddhist tradition implicitly recognizes non-Buddhists.[85] Non-Buddhist traditions would be accepted by Buddhists as yet another representation of the ultimate, insofar as they are "salvifically effective."[86] Therefore, this way of understanding what constitutes salvation, as defined by Buddhist teachings, can be considered a form of inclusivism. However, the *Lotus Sutra* can be interpreted differently, leading to various degrees of recognition of non-Buddhist traditions.[87]

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81 Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 62–3.

82 Ibid., 70–72.

83 Streng, *Emptiness*, 155f.

84 Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. 160f.

85 See, for example, Rita M. Gross, "Excuse Me, but What's the Question?" in *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 75–87.

86 John Makransky, "Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003), 334–61.

87 One of the major points of contention is whether the *Sutra* recognizes all paths as equally valid, or only one path (Skt. *ekayāna*) as ultimately valid and the others as inferior and only provisional. For views encouraging an accommodation of other traditions based on this concept, see, e.g., Kristin Beise Kiblinger, "Using Three-Vehicle Theory to Improve Buddhist Inclusivism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004), 159–69; Hiroshi Kanno, "Inclusivism and Religious Tolerance in the Lotus Sutra," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 15 (1995), 94–108.

As an explanatory principle of multiple manifestations of the Buddha, the Buddhist theory of *trikāya*, or three bodies (of the Buddha), is a perfect example of skillful means, making the Dharma accessible to those on different levels of spiritual development. The three bodies are the *dharmakāya* (the Truth Body), *saṃbhogakāya* (the Enjoyment Body), and *nirmāṇakaya* (the Emanation Body). *Dharmakāya* refers to the ultimate reality of Buddhahood, which entails the realization of emptiness itself, whereas *saṃbhogakāya* represents its manifestations, often in the form of celestial Buddhas residing in their Pure Lands. *Nirmāṇakaya* refers to its human manifestations, who lived and taught the Dharma in the world, with Śākyamuni Buddha being the Buddha of the present eon.[88]

It is also noteworthy that the *dharmakāya* sometimes takes a semi-personal aspect and is represented as Buddha Mahāvairocana (Ja. Dainichi Nyorai, Skt. Mahāvairocana Tathāgata) in the esoteric Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism,[89] or as Ādi Buddha (the primordial Buddha) in the *Kālacakratantra* tradition.[90] Some scholars of Buddhism claim that such an idea of the universal Buddha can be compared to a concept of God in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[91] Moreover, Ādi Buddha, in particular, has been considered by Indonesian Buddhists to be a Buddhist equivalent of the creator God in that it embodies, hence 'creates,' all perceptions or appearances that comprise the world on the conventional level.[92] Also comparable to the God of the Abrahamic traditions is Amitābha, the chief object of faith and worship in the Pure Land schools of Buddhism, who, like God, assumes a salvific role. However, Amitābha is not a creator or a judge of people's deeds at the end of their lives, but compassionately takes all who have not committed particularly grave sins against the Dharma to his Pure

88 For the development of the *trikāya* doctrine, see also G. M. Nagao, "On the Theory of Buddha-Body," in his *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies, Collected Papers of G. M. Nagao*, ed. and trans. L. S. Kawamura, in collaboration with G. M. Nagao (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 103–22.

89 Ryuichi Abé, "Shingon Buddhism, Japan," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 2, ed. Robert E. Buswell (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 764.

90 *Tantra* covers more esoteric traditions, esoteric texts in this case, in such Indian religions as Buddhism and Hinduism whereas *sūtra* refers to texts containing teachings and rules of a more exoteric nature. For the *Kālacakra Tantra*, see Chapter 2.

91 Harvey, "Portrayals of Ultimate Reality," 111–2; John Makransky, "Buddhist Inclusivism: Reflections toward a Contemporary Buddhist Theology of Religions," in *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2006), 56. Also see below for non-Western examples.

92 See Chapter 4. Cf. Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 51.

Land. Once they are reborn in the Pure Land, entering *nirvāṇa* after the end of their lives there, they may come back to this world to help sentient beings.

The idea of the ultimate, considered to manifest itself as vividly personal beings, would challenge the commonly held view of Buddhism as atheism. It can be argued, moreover, that even the concept of Dharma as the eternal truth, or that of *nirvāṇa* as the only permanent state, in itself could undermine the characterization of Buddhism not only as atheism but also as non-theism. These notions suggest the presence of a dimension of transcendence in Buddhist thought. In so far as interpretations of 'God' vary considerably among so-called theistic religions, such conceptions of transcendence could also be interpreted as 'God.'[93]

3.3 *Theravāda, Sōtō-Zen, and Jōdo-shin Schools*

The Theravāda, the dominant strand of Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar, is considered to have derived from the monastic lineage (or *nikāya*) called the Sthaviras from the time of early Buddhism. The Pali Tipitaka, the sacred text of the Theravāda, contains some of the oldest Buddhist materials that may have been uttered by the historical Buddha himself, and constitutes a major source of early Buddhism. Although what is today termed Theravāda Buddhism has incorporated various local factors as well as some elements of Mahāyāna provenance,[94] it is fundamentally focused on the attainment of *nirvāṇa* /arhatship through the practice of morally wholesome conduct and the cultivation of mental concentration, clarity, and awareness. While a plethora of *bodhisattva*s and Buddhas are venerated in the Mahāyāna, in the Theravāda the primary object of worship and emulation is the historical Buddha (often called Lord Buddha in English). It is also to be noted that Theravāda Buddhist communities in Southeast Asia, given the steady flow of immigration from China, have come into increasing contact with Chinese Buddhism. It is not so uncommon to see Chinese Buddhist elements, notably statues of major *bodhisattva*s such as Avalokiteśvara (Ch. Guanyin) or Bhaiṣajyaguru (aka. the medicine Buddha), incorporated into the life of Theravāda Buddhists.[95]

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93 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1979), 23–5.

94 The distinction between these two strands of Buddhism is not always rigid in practice: see, e.g., Mahinda Deegalle, "Mahāyāna Ideas within Theravāda?" *Buddhist Studies* 27 (1998), 99–118.

95 See, e.g., Jeffrey Samuels, "Contemporary Buddhism in Malaysia," *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, ed. Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press,

The Jōdo-shin and Sōtō schools, the two schools of Japanese Buddhism that receive particular attention in Buddhist-Muslim engagements, both originated in the Kamakura period (1192–1333). Currently two of the best-represented Buddhist traditions in Japan, they each emphasize one particular practice.[96] The Jōdo-shin (true Pure Land) school, aka Shin Buddhism, was founded by Shinran (1173–1262), who proclaimed that only faith (Ja. *shinjin*) in Amida's salvific power (the Other Power, Ja. *tariki*) is required to attain salvation (i.e., rebirth) in the Pure Land.[97] The Jōdo-shin practice is centered around the chanting of Amida's name (*nenbutsu: namu amida butsu,* homage to Amida Buddha). While it is practiced in other strands of Pure Land Buddhism to facilitate salvation, in the Jōdo-shin tradition *nenbutsu* serves as an expression of gratitude for what has already been granted through the universal compassion of Amida, rather than a means to attain it. The Sōtō school, on the other hand, was propagated by Dōgen (1200–1253), who received the transmission of a Zen (Ch. Ch'an) lineage from China. He taught *zazen* (seated meditation) undertaken with full trust in the Dharma as taught by Śākyamuni as the foremost means of attaining enlightenment.[98] Although it is not widely practiced among its lay followers now, *zazen* is still a significant part of clerical training in the school.[99]

4 Comparative Analysis and Implications for Buddhist-Muslim Perceptions

The doctrine of prophethood in Islam, as discussed above, has served as the basis for some Muslims to suggest that Gautama, the historical Buddha, was a

2016) [n.p.]. A large statue of the medicine Buddha is installed in the hall of a nuns' training center in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.

96 This may reflect the *Lotus* thought of *ekayāna* (single path). Carl Bielefeldt, "The One Vehicle and the Three Jewels: On Japanese Sectarianism and Some Ecumenical Alternatives," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 10 (1990), 10f.

97 His abandonment of self-effort (Ja. *jiriki*) seems to have been encouraged by the notion prevalent in his time that it was a period in which the Dharma was in decline (Ja. *mappō*). The concept of *tariki* and that of *tawakkul*, trust in God, in Islam have been compared by contemporary Shi'a scholars such as Shah-Kazemi and Abolghasem Jafari (see Chapters 4 and 6 respectively).

98 Although he is not regarded as a savior, the importance of faith in his teachings is emphasized. Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, vol. 2, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York and London: Macmillan, 1988–90), 90.

99 Ian Reader, "Zazenless Zen? The Position of Zazen in Institutional Zen Buddhism," *Japanese Religions* 14: 3 (1986), 7–27.

prophet, since he lived after Adam and before the coming of Muhammad.[100] Some scholars, mostly from South Asian backgrounds, have even suggested that the Buddha is indeed named in the Qur'an. They refer to the section mentioning Dhu-l Kifl, the man from Kapilavastu (21:85 and 38:48), or suggest that the fig tree (mentioned in 95:1) refers to the *bodhi* tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment.[101] While these theories of potential Qur'anic reference to the historical Buddha are not very widely accepted, they reflect the willingness among some Muslims to recognize other religions by extending their view of prophethood to the key figures of other traditions.

The general implication of this doctrinal framework for an Islamic understanding of Buddhism in terms of the latter's teaching is twofold. Firstly, Buddhism as the teaching of the Buddha can in part be thought to reflect the doctrine of *tawḥīd,* it being the Prophet Buddha's mission to bring the straying religious tendencies of his time back to *tawḥīd*.[102] Secondly, after the demise of

100 The potential prophethood of the Buddha has been mentioned by contemporary Muslims of diverse backgrounds, including those who are extremely critical of Buddhism. Some do so even without finding the teaching of *tawḥīd* in Buddhism. Kieko Obuse, "The Muslim Doctrine of Prophethood in the Context of Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Japan: Is the Buddha a Prophet?" *The Muslim World* 100: 2–3 (2010), 216–8. This suggests that their willingness to relate doctrinally to the other does not depend solely on how much doctrinal similarity they find between the two traditions, but on elements that are rather situational.

101 See, e.g., Muhammad Hamidullah (1909–2002), in his *Muhammad Rasulullah: A Concise Survey of the Life and Work of the Founder of Islam* (Hyderabad: Habib & Co., 1974), 27. Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand," *East-West Washington Working Papers* 7 (March 2007), 7. However, it is not clear who proposed these theories first. The one about Dhu-l Kifl has often been attributed to Ḥāmid ʿAbd al-Qādir, who reportedly presented the idea in his work *Būdhā al-akbar, hayātuhu wa falsafatuhu* [Buddha the Great, his life and philosophy] (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1957). See also Anna Akasoy, "Islam and Buddhism: The Arabian Prequel?" *Entangled Religions* 8 (2019), 22. While it does mention Kapilavastu as the birthplace of the Buddha Gotama (p.35), ʿAbd al-Qādir's work does not discuss a potential Qur'anic reference to it. Dhu-l Kifl is also mentioned on a selective list of prophets in the chapter titled "Buddhism and Islam" (p.144) but without further elaboration. What is notable, on the other hand, is the author's suggestion that the Sufi notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Oneness of Being), or of *ḥulūl* (denoting a manifestation of the divine qualities in persons, or divine indwelling), was influenced by Buddhism via the Neo-Platonic notion of emanation (pp.162–5). According to others, this theory about Dhu-l Kifl was developed by Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958). Zayaul Haque, "A Hindu View of Islam," *The Milli Gazette* (15 May 2001) <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15052001/sign.htm> [accessed 25 September 2021].

102 It has been suggested by some Muslim writers that the Buddha was part of the human evolution toward *tawḥīd* in that he rejected the polytheistic tendency of Hindus. Hosein, *Islam and Buddhism*, 9; Ayoub, "Islam and Pluralism," 111.

the Prophet Buddha, the Buddhist tradition itself became corrupt. Its followers alienated themselves from *dīn al-fiṭrah,* precipitating the coming of Prophet Muhammad, the last and the only universal prophet.

Insofar as it regards the historical Buddha as conveying the teaching of *tawḥīd* as one of the Muslim prophets, the doctrine of prophethood as applied to Buddhism establishes an inclusivist model, especially given the positioning of Muhammad's prophethood as a corrective to the teachings of all other traditions that preceded him.[103] The importance of *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God, as suggested by this framework, could be problematic for Buddhists, to the extent that Buddhism is not predicated upon a creator or monotheistic God-like concept. The resulting subordination of the Buddha's role to that of Muhammad would also be unacceptable for Buddhists, especially the followers of the Theravāda tradition, in which the historical Buddha has symbolic importance as one who, via his personal commitment to practice through innumerable lifetimes, realized and delivered the Dharma.

If, however, *tawḥīd* is understood as a unifying principle of the entire universe, whereby the divine Essence constitutes a basis/source of all Being/Existence as Its manifestations, it would establish a more pluralistic view. With holy beings reflecting and embodying the Real, and ordinary beings having the potential to also share in it, this would make the Islamic understanding of the ultimate truth more resonant with the Buddhist notion of Dharma, the nature and ground of things, which may be realized and experienced by all beings.

Compared with Muslims, Buddhists have been less interested in relating doctrinally to other religions.[104] Early Buddhist scriptures pre-date Islam (as well as Christianity) significantly, and obviously do not mention Islam or Muslims. They also show that the historical Buddha was largely silent on what is called today the question of God.[105] However, the Buddha's worldview lacks the notion of a fundamental beginning of the world (i.e., a first cause). This absence renders the idea of creation untenable for Buddhists in principle.[106]

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103 Although some scholars have developed a pluralistic reading of this doctrine, "the overall result of such efforts is not an open-ended appreciation of the non-Muslim Other as such, but a subtle 'inclusivism.'" Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 229. Despite the heavy presence of inclusivist or even exclusivist views within Islamic theology, on the other hand, Muslim attitudes to their religious others have been largely pluralistic on the ground, thanks to the idea of ubiquitous divine revelation. Ridgeon and Schmidt-Leukel, "Introduction," 3.

104 For Buddhist attitudes to the theology of religions, see Owen, "A Buddhist Response."

105 Based on this, some contemporary Muslims have argued that the Buddha did not deny the existence of God (see Chapter 4).

106 Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 52f; Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 204. Classical Buddhist engagements with theism were undertaken primarily with the Hindu worldview in mind. The earliest Buddhist refutation of the concept of God can go back to

Unlike the Muslim doctrine of prophethood, which has often provided an inclusivist framework for Muslims to relate to Buddhism, the Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal has not usually been applied to Prophet Muhammad by Buddhists. This may be because Buddhists find the content of Muhammad's message (i.e., *tawḥīd*) so alien to Buddhist teachings that they are reluctant to recognize him as a *bodhisattva*.

While Buddhists have been rather silent on how comparable Muhammad could be to spiritually advanced figures in Buddhism, a few South Asian Muslims have attempted to relate Islam and Buddhism using a Buddhist concept. They examined Buddhist texts and then proposed that Muhammad be considered as a *bodhisattva*, or more specifically as Maitreya, the future Buddha.[107] The keenest proponent of this idea is the Ahmadiyya scholar Abdul Haq Vidyarthi (1888–1977), who argues that the advent of Maitreya Buddha (as Prophet Muhammad) was prophesied by the historical Buddha, enumerating a number of parallels between them.[108] Attempts by Buddhists to employ Islamic concepts in relating to Islam have also been rare. One notable exception is Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906–1993), an influential Thai monk-scholar renowned for his innovative interpretations of Theravāda teachings. Referring to the Qur'anic idea "For every nation there is an apostle (10:47)," he suggests that major teachers of different traditions share the same objective, just as prophets are believed to do in Islam.[109]

4.1 *Holy Men in Buddhism and Islam: Prophets, Saints, and Bodhisattvas*

Despite the difficulties found in drawing parallels between the Muslim doctrine of prophethood and the Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal, one can see that the role of a prophet and that of a *bodhisattva* in their respective traditions do have

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the Buddha, who rejected the Brahmanical claim that Great Brahmā, one of the highest deities in Brahmanism, created the world. Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 26; Harris, "Buddhism and the Religious Other," 107. For a useful summary of a Buddhist critique of a creator God, see Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 207–11.

107 Comparability between the Buddhist idea of Maitreya and the Islamic notion of *mahdī* (a messianic figure) as understood by Shi'a Muslims has also been suggested: Shigeru Kamada, "Mahadī to maitorēya (mirokubutsu): isurāmu to bukkyō ni okeru kyūsaisha," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions* 8 (2012), 63–79.

108 Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, *Mohammad in World Scriptures*, vol. 3, *A Comparative Study of the Teachings and Prophecies Foretelling the Advent of the Holy Prophet Mohammed Found Extant in Zoroastrian, Hindu, and Buddhist Scriptures* (Lahore: Din Muhammadi Press, 1975), 1007–98, see esp. 1049–57.

109 Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism* (Bangkok: Karn Pim Pranakorn Partnership, pref. 1967), 8–11. See also Chapter 4.

some resonance with each other. As far as their activities in the earthly world are concerned, certain *bodhisattvas* are human beings, just like the prophets of Islam, embodying the highest ideal in guiding the ordinary populace. At times they share the role of a religious teacher and social activist, though the actual content of their mission may differ. Although the notion of revelation as such tends to be regarded as alien to Buddhism, it can further be noted that the role of some advanced adepts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, who are believed to have received teachings from celestial *bodhisattva*s, could be compared to the revelatory role of Muslim prophets.[110]

In that they assist beings in their mundane and more spiritual aims, and are worshipped for the solace and guidance they offer, *bodhisattva*s could also be said to resemble Muslim saints who are widely venerated as mediators between human beings and God.[111] The tendency among Muslims to attach a degree of holiness to such personalities may in itself create a theological tension with the concept of *tawḥīd*, making the practice appear 'polytheistic.'[112] This is highly visible in the context of Buddhist-Muslim perceptions, because Muslims tend to regard Buddhists venerating various Buddhas and *bodhisattva*s as idolatrous, thereby somehow underplaying the implications of the presence of such holy men in their own tradition. Part of this conundrum derives from the stark distinction often made between God and human beings, as well as the idea that saints and prophets remain thoroughly human. However, the veneration of saintly figures should not necessarily be seen as problematic in Islam, i.e., constituting idolatry, if these figures, as mentioned above,

110 In Tibetan Buddhism, for example, Asaṅga, a fourth-century Buddhist sage, is believed to have received teachings from *bodhisattva* Maitreya: Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 155–6.

111 Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 35. Muslim mystics and *bodhisattva*s in Buddhism are also comparable in that they provide guidance in ways most appropriate to the circumstances of their listeners: Cleary, "Buddhism and Islam," 35–7. Prophets, on the other hand, are not usually considered available for intercession, except at the time of Judgment. There have also been Christian attempts to employ a general category of sainthood for the purpose of recognizing holy figures in other traditions in a way analogous to how the Muslim doctrine of prophethood operates. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 300–303. See also Alan Race, "The Value of the Symbolic Jesus for Christian Involvement in Interfaith Dialogue," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Sharada Sugirtharajah (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83–94. In this scheme Jesus would be regarded as a prototypical holy figure, rather than the one and only savior.

112 Yasushi Tōnaga, "Tashinkyōteki isuramu," in *Shakaiteki ketsugō to minshū undō*, ed. Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1999), 192–220; Masatoshi Kisaichi, *Isuramu seija* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1996).

are seen as somewhat embodying ultimate reality itself through the *barakah* (divine blessing) they transmit. One could argue that they are divine in that they reflect the Real, in a way analogical to how Buddhas, once enlightened, function more like the Dharma itself, embodying the knowledge, qualities, and power that offer ultimate assistance to sentient beings.[113] This challenges the contrastive view of Islam and Buddhism as focusing on transcendence and immanence respectively.[114]

Turning to the attributes of God and the Buddha, there are a few similarities as well as differences that are significant to Buddhist-Muslim mutual understanding. First of all, compassion (usually covered by the terms *raḥmah* and *karuṇā* in Islam and Buddhism respectively) is a very important quality in both God and the Buddha, although the concept may not have the same connotation in both traditions.[115] On the other hand, Buddhists tend to be suspicious of the concept of an omnipotent highest God, especially the creator (*al-khāliq*)/judge (*al-ḥakīm*, wise, and *al-ʿādil*, just) aspects of God, the concept of His oneness (*tawḥīd*), and the centrality of revelation, all of which are of fundamental doctrinal significance in Islam.[116] This is because the Buddhist worldview, which is based on dependent origination or the law of *karma* and rebirth, does not require (or allow for) such a God.[117] Dependent origination, or emptiness, is simply the way things are, and is not an agency who is 'outside' (or, in that sense, 'transcends') that causality or inter-relatedness of things, causing all things without being influenced by them. From the Buddhist point

113 This point is presented forcefully by Shah-Kazemi, who argues that the Buddhist practice of venerating Buddha images is acceptable from an Islamic point of view (see Chapter 4).

114 While the idea of all sentient beings as potential Buddhas points to a clear focus on immanence in Buddhism, the Buddhist view of ultimate reality, be it *nirvāṇa* or emptiness, can also be regarded as strongly inclined toward transcendence. This confirms the difficulty of describing Buddhism and Islam using the transcendence-immanence binary.

115 Compassion has been actively discussed as a bridge between Buddhism and Islam in various dialogue sessions held in Southeast Asia (see Chapter 3).

116 Islam could be regarded as "unsatisfactory" but "not necessarily false," given that revelation is considered an uncertain foundation in Buddhism. Jayatilleke, *Buddhist Attitude*, 28–9.

117 Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 7–8. In this sense, Buddhism can be considered atheistic while its recognition of numerous divine/heavenly beings can make it appear polytheistic. Richard P. Hayes, "Principled Atheism in the Buddhist Scholastic Tradition," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16: 1 (1988), 5–28; Paul Williams, "Buddhism, God, Aquinas and Morality: An Only Partially Repentant Reply to Perry Schmidt-Leukel and José Cabezon," in *Converging Ways: Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity*, ed. John D'Arcy May (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2007), 117–54. Highlighting that those beings do not constitute a focus in the conception or attainment of the ultimate in Buddhism, Peter Harvey proposes that Buddhism be called "trans-polytheistic." Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 1.

of view, this latter idea would be problematic since God should ultimately be governed by the principles of causality, even more so if He is understood as a personal God.[118]

However, the Islamic idea of God governing the human world should not pose as much difficulty as is often assumed on the basis of comparisons between the attributes of God and of the Buddha. First of all, both Islamic and Buddhist worldviews can be thought of as 'systems' for determining the course of the phenomenal world and, as such, consider human actions (including intentions) as the foremost basis for destiny. They both limit such individual freedom, to the extent that human acts are somewhat 'controlled' by a larger principle: God in Islam, and dependent origination, or *karma*, in Buddhism.[119] In esoteric strands of Buddhism, moreover, the Dharma (or the Buddha) can also be understood as the principle that makes the universe come to be, i.e., the source of all existence, that is analogous to the concept of divine creation in Islam.[120] Most importantly, moreover, the notions of remoteness and incomparability of God (Ar. *tanzīh*, transcendence), are balanced in Islam by those of closeness and similarity to human beings (Ar. *tashbīh*, anthropomorphism). While God shares in nothing of the human realm, nor has direct earthly manifestations, He is known through concrete expressions of his being, such as the divine names and 'signs' (sing. Ar. *āyah*) which include human beings themselves, who are created in God's 'form' (Ar. *ṣūrah*). It is through such merciful acts of concrete self-revelation that human beings can understand that God is the only Reality, through whom everything else exists, which is ultimately explained by the principle of *tawḥīd*.[121]

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118 Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 207–8. The idea that even God is governed by the principle of dependent origination has been expressed by some Japanese Buddhists (see Chapter 6).

119 From a Buddhist perspective, it would be possible to think of God simply as *karma*. Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 209.

120 In containing all "ontological potentialities," emptiness can be considered as having an "ever-creative" aspect. Izutsu, "The Nexus of Ontological Events," 170. On how emptiness, conceptualized as the Buddha Mahāvairocana, can be the origin of all phenomenal 'things' as per Shingon Buddhist thinking, see Toshihiko Izutsu, "Imibunsetsu riron to kūkai," in his *Imi no fukami e* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1985, 2019), 264–307. From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, Alexander Berzin has compared Ādi Buddha, a manifestation of the Dharmakāya, to God in 'creating' human perceptions, i.e., the world (see Chapter 4). Within Theravāda Buddhism, the Aggañña Sutta from the Pali Tipitaka can be regarded as containing the elements analogical to those found in the Creation and Fall story. Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 25–6.

121 See Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1994), 70–74.

While God and the Buddha may appear rather irreconcilable in terms of their concrete attributes, one can see that the way God is both non-personal and unintelligible to ordinary beings, and yet has personal attributes allowing them to comprehend Him, forms a promising basis on which to draw parallels with the Buddhist idea of the indefinable emptiness (or *dharmakāya*) having rather personalized manifestations. It also suggests that anthropomorphic references to God could be interpreted from a Buddhist perspective as Islamic expressions of skillful means intended for ordinary followers. These observations could help us transcend the distinction often made between Buddhism and Islam as having personal and impersonal conceptions of ultimate reality respectively, and deflate the frequent accusations of idolatry leveled against Buddhism; ultimately, anthropomorphism in Islam and 'idolatry' in Buddhism both boil down to the necessity to provide a plastic and narrative shape to the level of transcendence for the benefit of ordinary practitioners who would otherwise be barred from consistently abstract definitions.

For a Buddhist understanding of Islam, it can furthermore be observed that the concept of emptiness as expounded in the *trikāya* doctrine, which accounts for the existence of many Buddhas and *bodhisattva*s, could provide a way of interpreting major concepts and figures in Islam.[122] Although it has not been as widely employed in the context of Buddhist-Muslim relations as has the Muslim doctrine of prophethood, discussions based on the *trikāya* doctrine have been undertaken in the Buddhist-Christian context, in which the concept of God is seen as a parallel or 'substitute' for the Buddhist notion of *dharmakāya*.[123]

This model can establish a parallelist account, upon which the concept of emptiness and that of *tawḥīd* (in its literal meaning: making many one) are considered to generate and draw all their different manifestations together as one reality.[124] The non-personal, unknown, 'no-thing' aspect of God (or the Real) may be related to *dharmakāya*, while the personified aspect of God, as manifested to His followers, can be recognized as *saṃbhogakāya* in exercising

122 Makransky, "Buddhist Inclusivism," 55.

123 See, for example, Keith Ward, *Religions and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in World's Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 167f. The theory of *trikāya* has also been compared to the Trinitarian creed of Christianity. J. C. Cleary, "Trikāya and Trinity: The Mediation of the Absolute," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 6 (1986), 63–78.

124 The idea of 'one in many, many in one' is found in both traditions. It is acknowledged, for example, in Mohammad Khatami, "Bunmeikan no taiwa: nihon no shi to iran no shinchi shugi," trans. Shintarō Yoshimura, *Sekai* 683 (Jan. 2001), 125. In Buddhism, the expression is typically found in the Huayen (Ja. *kegon*) school of Buddhism. Makio Takemura, *Indobukkyō no rekishi: satori to kū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004), 160f.

various qualities such as wisdom, compassion, and salvific power. Finally, Prophet Muhammad could be considered to be on the level of *nirmāṇakaya*, in that he was a living human teacher of the Truth, just as was Śākyamuni Buddha.[125]

This parallel, however, would not do full justice to the notions of God and Prophet Muhammad as understood in Islam. First of all, although the *dharmakāya* and God might both be recognized as ultimate principles of the universe or the Reality itself, the concepts can be significantly different, depending on how the former is understood. The *dharmakāya* tends to be considered empty of true existence, although it may also be equated with the Dharma or Buddhahood, hence eternally 'existing.'[126] God, on the other hand, is more inherently existent, albeit in a completely different way from His Creation.[127] The creator/judge aspect of God, which is crucial in the Muslim (as well as in Judaeo-Christian) worldview, does not find proper expression in the Buddhist idea of *saṃbhogakāya* as the latter does not engage in either activity. Similarly, the element of revelation manifested in the role of Prophet Muhammad, which is again of central importance in Islam, cannot be acknowledged or accommodated by the *trikāya* theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the Theravāda tradition, would-be Buddhas discover and realize the truth for themselves and teach it to others. In Mahāyāna traditions, *nirmāṇakāya* figures are already enlightened. Instead of receiving such enlightenment from an external source, i.e., God, the source is generated from propensities already existent. It is also to be noted that, unlike *nirmāṇakāya* which is characterized by the emptiness of inherent existence or entity, Muhammad is neither a manifestation of God nor in any way similar to Him, which renders drawing parallels problematic, although the previously mentioned Sufi perspective might help resolve this tension. Insofar as this view of the *dharmakāya* is an elaboration on the Buddhist worldview, this framework may also be regarded as inclusivist.[128]

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125 What is presented here is an adaptation of the interpretation provided by Masao Abe, whose view is discussed in Chapter 6.

126 While *dharmakāya* is fundamentally beyond the conventional distinction of existence and non-existence, it is equated, for example, with Dainichi Nyorai in Shingon Buddhism, as ultimate reality.

127 God in Islam and emptiness have been compared as the principles of one and zero respectively. See Toshio Kuroda's remark in Sachiya Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran* (Tokyo: Suzuki Shuppan, 1992), 17.

128 One possible parallelist alternative would be to resort to the idea of the Real as the product or emanation of the *dharmakāya* preaching the Dharma, developed within Shingon Buddhism. This could be regarded as a parallel to the Islamic notion of revelation from a divine source, which would otherwise appear alien to Buddhism, although its applicability may be limited due to this type of articulation of *dharmakāya* being highly specific.

In spite of these potential interpretative difficulties, the *trikāya* framework can provide a helpful starting point for dialogue between Buddhists and Muslims on a doctrinal level. At the very least, it could provide points of departure for (Mahāyāna) Buddhist ways of relating to Islam, thanks to the structural parallels evoked between key concepts and figures in Buddhism and Islam.[129] This type of parallelism has already been highlighted by a few Buddhists, such as Masao Abe, a Japanese Zen scholar who was one of the most significant Buddhist contributors to the contemporary Buddhist-Christian dialogue. An increasing number of Buddhists have also been drawing parallels between God and emptiness, although not always referring to the concept of *dharmakāya*.[130] Particularly detailed structural parallels have been suggested by Toshihiko Izutsu, a Japanese authority on Islamic philosophy and mysticism with a Zen Buddhist background, between the spiritual experiences found in Islamic mystical philosophy and Buddhist (particularly Zen and Shingon) practice, the multi-layered nature of which he identifies as reflecting the nature of both consciousness and reality (see Chapter 6 for Abe and Izutsu).

Before exploring such contemporary views, let us first examine how the ideas of Buddhas and prophets, the highest prototypical 'charismatic beings' in Buddhism and Islam respectively, have provided key conceptual assets in Buddhist and Muslim attempts to make sense of one another across their shared global history.

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129 Those who accept Ādi Buddha or Mahāvairocana as the personalized expression of *dharmakāya* could equate *dharmakāya* with God in terms of both personal and non-personal aspects.

130 A similar theory was proposed by D. T. Suzuki, Abe's precursor in propagating Zen in the West, who, suggesting that *dharmakāya* can be the God of Buddhism, recognizes Muhammad as an "incarnation" of God, like the historical Buddha, alongside Jesus, Confucius, Laozi, and so on. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1907, 1977), 63; Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 195. Another Japanese Buddhist who suggests that *dharmakāya* is a Buddhist equivalent of God is Kōsei Morimoto, a leading Japanese Buddhist cleric and scholar of Islam (see Chapter 6).

CHAPTER 2

Buddhas and Prophets in the Shared History

The history of Buddhist-Muslim relations started as soon as Islam established itself in West Asia in the late seventh century and has unfolded in a variety of contexts over almost 1,400 years. Through identifying major developments in socio-political and intellectual stages of shared Buddhist and Muslim history, this chapter demonstrates how different modes of encounter, be they military confrontations or social accommodation, political struggle, or cultural cross-fertilization (or, as was often the case, combinations thereof), have yielded a wide range of mutual perceptions and doctrinal engagements. Despite their variety, however, many of the views produced through the mutual engagements have invoked the categories of their own traditions, the Buddha and the prophet in particular, to describe their religious other and to make it internally accessible. As already sketched in Chapter 1, the Buddha was often understood to be a prophet or the creator by Muslim writers, while God and Prophet Muhammad were occasionally presented as Buddhas (or *bodhisattva*s) by Buddhists.

The present chapter discusses Buddhist and Muslim attempts to portray and understand each other's traditions over three periods of history. The early period (632–1256) ends with the establishment of the Mongol Il-khanid dynasty. The post-classical period (1256–1585) runs up to the establishment of British rule of India, whose policies would also impact the modes of Buddhist-Muslim engagement in Southeast Asia. The modern period (1585–1947) concludes with the independence of India. Each section first outlines Buddhist-Muslim relations, followed by a discussion of major writings produced in the period and how these have been influenced by such relations.

1 The Early Period (632–1256)

1.1 *First Encounters*

Early Buddhist-Muslim interactions were highly varied, mainly due to the diverse distributions of local religions and power struggles between their representatives. The main stages of their early encounters can be broadly categorized into two groups, although the modes of their engagement vary within each group. The first group includes the farther regions, such as present-day

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China and Sri Lanka[1] while the second covers the regions known today as eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and northern India.

Despite the common presentation of the first Buddhist-Muslim encounters primarily in terms of Muslim attacks on Buddhism in India, their early relations included peaceful encounters through diplomacy, trade, and immigration. Muslims from Arabia first settled in Sri Lanka toward the end of the seventh or early eighth century. Adam's Peak, a pilgrimage destination for Muslims as well as for Buddhists and Christians, also attracted Muslim visitors from the Indian subcontinent, some of whom eventually settled on the island.[2]

Diplomatic relations between Arab Muslims (Ch. *dashi*) and China, where Buddhism exercised a strong cultural influence, started in 651 through a delegation sent by the third caliph, 'Uthmān.[3] During the T'ang period (618–907), Muslim traders resided in political capitals and large commercial or port cities such as Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), Guangzhou (Canton), and Quanzhou, where they were allowed to establish a community and practice Islam.[4] They started to settle and integrate gradually into wider Chinese society in the middle of the Song period (960–1279).[5]

Though military confrontation was not completely absent between Muslims and the Chinese, it was primarily political in nature, rather than triggered by religious difference. For example, the T'ang Chinese were defeated by the Abbasids in the battle of Talas (751), but were in turn assisted by Arab troops sent by the caliph al-Mansūr in putting down the An Lu-shan rebellion (755–766).[6]

Early Buddhist-Muslim encounters in military contexts elsewhere also show that Muslim policies (e.g., iconoclastic activities directed against Buddhist 'idols') were mainly motivated by economic or political concerns and did not

1 Although Sri Lanka was called Ceylon prior to its independence in 1972, the current nomenclature is used throughout the present work.

2 V. Mohan, "Islam in Sri Lanka" in *Islam in Asia*, ed. Asghar Ali Engineer (Lahore: Vanguard, 1986), 113–5.

3 The refusal of the Arab delegation to perform the *kow-tow* (prostration) to the Emperor caused much furor, but they were pardoned on grounds of difference of custom. Raphael Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization in Chinese Islam," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levitzion (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 164.

4 Some married Chinese women, thereby initiating a process of Islamization of sections of the Chinese population. Chō Shōshi (Zhang Cheng-zhi), *Kaikyō kara mita chūgoku* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1993), 16f.

5 See Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 24–31.

6 Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 164–5.

usually constitute religious propaganda against Buddhists.[7] Most of the military advancements made by early Muslims into the Buddhist regions were made to gain control over important overland trade routes in Central Asia, which had previously been in the hands of Buddhists.[8]

The Muslim-Buddhist encounter in eastern Iran, which took place around Bactria, was fairly peaceful once Muslim rule was established.[9] In Balkh, the monastery of Naw Bahar (new *vihāra*, i.e., monastery), was in the hands of hereditary priest-rulers of the Barmakid family, who enjoyed considerable power even after the Muslim conquest.[10] Those contacts may have contributed to the development of Sufism[11] and the *madrasah* (the Islamic educational institution), which is believed to have originated in Khurasan[12] on the model of Buddhist monastic schools before it was introduced to the western part of the Islamic world. Cross-fertilization between the two traditions also took place in disciplines such as philosophy and astrology.[13]

In Afghanistan, on the other hand, local Buddhist rulers resisted Muslim advancements for much longer. Bamiyan, where the giant Buddhas were built in the sixth century, stayed out of reach of Muslim power until the late ninth

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7 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 44.

8 Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 55; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 44. Indeed, those who came under Muslim rule were usually not encouraged to convert to Islam as the poll-tax they would pay as non-Muslims was an important source of income for Muslim rulers.

9 That Bactria was a flourishing center of Buddhism is attested by Chinese pilgrims, such as Xuanzang, who traveled to the region from 629 to 645. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 43.

10 Their descendants enjoyed the position of viziers for the early part of the Abbasid period (750–1258). Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "The Coming of Islam to Afghanistan," in *Islam in Asia*, vol.1 *South Asia*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 5. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 59–60; Mostafa Vaziri, *Buddhism in Iran: An Anthropological Approach to Traces and Influences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 95–6.

11 Potential Buddhist influence on early Sufism is found in the work of al-Ḥallāj (857–922). Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, vol. 1, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

12 Richard W. Bulliet, "Naw Bahar and the Survival of Iranian Buddhism," *Iran* 14 (1976), 145; Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 96.

13 See, e.g., Shlomo Pines, "A Study of the Impact of Indian, Mainly Buddhist, Thought on Some Aspects of Kalām Doctrines," *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), 182–203; Anna Caiozzo, *Images du Ciel au Moyen Age* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 161. Most recently, a possible influence of Central Asian Buddhist philosophy on al-Māturīdī has been pointed out: Jason Browning, "The Soteriological Force in al-Māturīdī's Ontology and its Roots in Central Asian Buddhist Scholastic Philosophy," paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting, 1 December 2021 (online).

century.[14] Despite the bitter encounters they had with Buddhists, however, early Muslim rulers did not show particular aversion to Buddha statues, often treating them as booty rather than as objects of blasphemy to be destroyed. For example, when the king of Kabul was captured and converted to Islam, he presented the caliph al-Ma'mūn with a golden statue, which the caliph sent to Mecca to be displayed there.[15]

The first Muslim conquest of Buddhist-populated areas in India, which started in Sind in 632, was relatively easy.[16] This is mainly because Buddhists, who had been underprivileged in contrast to the dominant Hindus, looked to Muslims positively in their struggle to survive, and so were willing to cooperate with them.[17] Under Muslim rule, Buddhists were allowed to perform their rituals in temples, as were the followers of other religious traditions.[18]

When later Muslim rulers, such as Maḥmūd al-Ghaznī (reigned 998–1130) and Muḥammad Ghūrī (reigned 1173–1206), raided important Buddhist sites of northern India, it was mainly because these major Buddhist centers had considerable wealth, power, and influence. The conventional view is that several prominent Buddhist monasteries in the region, such as Nalanda and Vikramasila, were targeted in these raids, whereby their monks and resources were completely destroyed, signaling the demise of Buddhism on the Indian subcontinent. However, the resulting narrative of 'the Muslim destruction of Buddhism in India' lacks solid historical evidence. It was produced based on the work of British colonial propaganda, which sought to highlight the extremely aggressive nature of Muslim armies through dubious interpretations of a

14 Bosworth, "The Coming of Islam to Afghanistan," 5, 11–2. Bamiyan continued to function as a Buddhist site well into the eleventh century. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 48, 51.

15 Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 160–61. The practice of sending back Hindu and Buddhist statues to caliphs continued until later. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 67.

16 For the Arab conquest of Sind, see Derryl N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

17 For the decline of Buddhism in India and Buddhist reactions to Muslims at this time, see Trevor Ling, *Buddhist Revival in India: Aspects of the Sociology of Buddhism* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), Ch. 3; Shunji Hosaka, *Indobukkyō wa naze horondanoka* (Tokyo: Hokuju Shupppan, 2003); Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 52–4, 96–7. It is also possible that local Buddhists preferred dealing with Muslims, who shared their mercantile orientation, rather than with the Hindu ruling classes. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 226; vol. 2, *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 276, 557.

18 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 49–50.

single episode contained in a thirteenth-century Persian-language source.[19] Indeed, Buddhism did not disappear immediately after the time of these putative attacks, but even witnessed a limited revival.[20]

1.2 *Early Muslim Writings*

Although Muslims had numerous encounters with Buddhists, their references to Buddhists and Buddhism do not evidence comprehensive knowledge of the tradition. The absence of a systematic understanding of Buddhism among early Muslims can partly be attributed to the lack of direct reference to Buddhism in the Qur'an.[21] It identifies Jews, Christians, and Sabeans as the "People of the Book" (Ar. *ahl al-kitāb*) who enjoy the status of 'protected' people (Ar. *dhimmī*) and are accorded rights to perform their rituals in return for paying taxes, such as a poll-tax (Ar. *jizyah*). To this category of people, some early Muslim scholars added Zoroastrians.

Thus, Buddhists are not formally recognized as belonging to the People of the Book. As seen below, however, the category arguably was extended to Buddhists (and Hindus), at least practically, when early Muslim rulers allowed them to practice their traditions in the regions they conquered.[22] The reference made by classical scholars to a teacher called Budasaf as the founder of the Sabean religion could perhaps have also formed a basis for Muslim recognition of Buddhists as 'People of the Book.'[23] The word *budasaf* is a corruption of the term *bodhisattva* (also rendered as *budhasaf*, *budhasf*, *yudasaf*, and *bodisaf*), and was often used to refer to the historical Buddha in popular stories and scholarly writings alike.[24]

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19 The source is Minhai-i Siraj Juzjani's *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, which appeared in two pieces of colonial scholarship in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. For the interpretive problems and historiographical uncertainties surrounding this source, see Truschke, "The Power of the Islamic Swords." For an earlier critique of the common narrative, see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 557.

20 Truschke, "The Power of the Islamic Swords," 422–3; Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1994), 76; Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 347.

21 Some (e.g., Vaziri, *Buddhism in Iran*, 91–9) have suggested the possibility of Buddhist influence and/or presence in pre-Islamic Mecca, yet there is no conclusive evidence for this. Akasoy, "Islam and Buddhism."

22 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 49.

23 See the view of al-Mas'ūdī below. The open-ended nature of the category of the People of the Book, in line with the pluralist spirit of the Qur'an, has also been pointed out by various contemporary Muslim scholars. Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 335.

24 The most notable example of an Islamic story with a Buddhist origin is the *Bilawhar wa Yudasaf* (or *Budhasaf*). It is a syncretic compilation of life episodes about the Buddha and his teacher Bilawhar. Its Greek version became popular later among Christians, as

As indicated above, early Muslims also took great interest in Buddhist 'idols.'[25] However, they often did not know what these images represented, and rarely criticized Buddhists seriously for venerating them. The harsh criticism of idol worship found in the Qur'an, which is primarily directed to the people in Mecca, was apparently not used by early Muslims as a basis of ultimate scriptural indictment against the Buddhist practice of statue veneration or as a pretext for dismissing Buddhists in general. Major historical accounts also depict the ways Muslim military leaders refrain from destroying 'idols,' without passing detailed theological judgment on them.[26] Muslims also gained much artistic and literary imagination from Buddha statues. While the term *budd* was usually employed for statues, *bot* (or *but*), another corrupted version of the word *buddha*, came to be used in poetry. Its meanings ranged from 'an idol' to a metaphor for ideal human beauty.[27] The two Buddha statues in Bamiyan were known as red *but* and white *but* and were considered to represent two lovers.[28]

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the story of Barlaam and Josaphat. Donald S. Lopez, *Strange Tales of an Oriental Idol: an Anthology of Early European Portrayals of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 23–32; S. M. Stern and Sofie Walzer, *Three Unknown Buddhist Stories in an Arabic Version* (Oxford: Cassier, 1971), 1–3; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 72–3; Anna Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path, Rashīd al-Dīn's Life of the Buddha: Islamic Perspectives," in *Rashīd al-Dīn, Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchanges in Ilkhanid Iran*, eds. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (London: Warburg Institute, 2013), 178–80. A few stories based on the *Pañcatantra* are also found in *Kalila and Dimna*, complied by the Persian writer Ibn al-Muqaffa' (721–757). See Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Karīra to Dimuna*, trans. Yoshiko Kikuchi (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995).

25 Though he did not know much about Buddhism, al-Bīrūnī (973–1050?), an important writer on India, left a detailed account of statues: al-Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about AD 1030*, vol. 1, trans. Edward C. Sachau (London: Trübner, 1888). The presence of 'idols' was also noted by Muslim travelers to China. Jean Sauvaget, trans., *Akhbār al-Sīn wa 'l-Hind: Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde Rédigée en 851* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1948), 25; Donald Daniel Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800* (Canberra, ACT: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986), 26.

26 Jane I. Smith, "Early Muslim Accounts of Buddhism in India," *Studies in Islam* 10 (1973), 88–9; R. C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1954), 30f. The highly favorable treatment of Buddhists among Muslim writers may reflect their view of Buddhists as collaborators on one hand and of Hindus as the main rivals on the other. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 52.

27 The name Naw Bahar was also used as a literary metaphor to refer to temples with beatified Buddha statues (*bot*). Vaziri, *Buddhism in Iran*, 97.

28 Morgan, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan*, 56, 114, 116. See also Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 828.

Early Muslim writers employed Islamic concepts, as well as Indian terms to categorize non-Muslims such as Buddhists. Their uses of such terms are rather broad and do not accompany detailed examinations of the Buddhist tradition. The examples of Indian terms used for Buddhists include *sumanṅiya* (or *samaṅiyya*, or *shamani*), which is derived from the Sanskrit *śramaṇa*, designating ascetics of ancient India including Buddhist monks; and *barāhima*, a derivative of the word *brāhmaṇa*, originally referring to followers of Brahmanism.[29] A notable example of an Islamic (theological) concept is *mu'attila*, a label for heretical Islamic groups who deny all of God's attributes, reducing Him to a completely abstract depersonalized entity.[30] While this may suggest that some early Muslims were aware that Buddhists do not recognize concrete attributes within ultimate reality (perhaps to be equated with *nirvāṇa*), there is not much evidence of detailed knowledge or elaboration about the Buddhist soteriology in early Muslim writings.[31]

The concepts employed most frequently by early Muslim writers in discussing Buddhism were those of a prophet and of the creator. They were both used to describe the Buddha, often at the same time. The juxtaposition of these two radically different concepts may reflect an awareness of different schools of Buddhism. Al-Maqdisī, writing c.966, observed that Buddhists were of two types: those who regarded the Buddha as a prophet, and those who regarded him as the creator.[32] Citing a travel report commissioned by the Abbasid vizier Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī,[33] Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995), mentioned disagreements that "the people of India" had on the status of the Buddha:

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29 Jacques Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period: 650–1500," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56–7. For the concept of *barāhima*, see Norman Calder, "Barāhima: Literary Construct to Historical Reality," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57 (1994), 40–51.

30 Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period," 33. One typical example of such group is the Mu'tazilites, who strongly denied that substantive attributes could be ascribed to God as if they were separate entities. Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 34.

31 The primary purpose of such discussions seems to have been clarification of different theological positions within Islam, rather than discussing Buddhist teachings per se. Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 178. Sometimes Muslim theologians even used their misconceptualizations of Buddhism to attack other theological positions. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 70–71.

32 Bruce B. Lawrence, *Al-Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976), 103; Smith, "Early Muslim Accounts," 93.

33 Ibn Khālid seems to have been the one who commissioned the report, while the identity of the person who made the report is unknown. Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 826. Cf. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 61f.

> One party asserted that he [Buddha] was the likeness of the Creator … Another group said that he was the likeness of his apostle [sent] to them. … One sect (party) said that the apostle was one of the angels. Another sect stated that the apostle was a man among the people. Then a group said that he was a demon among the demons, while [another] sect stated that he was a likeness of the Būdāsaf, the wise, who came to them from Allāh.[34]

This seems to reflect debates among early schools of Buddhism (*nikāya*s) as well as the 'deification' of Buddha within the Mahāyāna tradition (see Chapters 1, 4, and 6).[35]

However, most writers do not provide specific reasons for either possibility. There is very little indication that they were motivated by an overt intention to locate Buddhism within an Islamic worldview, either. Their application of Islamic terms to Buddhist concepts does not seem to have been based on careful examinations of Buddhist teachings, let alone systematic comparisons with Islamic doctrines. It was made for the sake of convenience, on the basis of simplistic impressions, to make Buddhism accessible to their Muslim readers. It is however possible that the idea of the Buddha as a prophet may have derived from a generally positive impression that writers had about Buddhists. For example, Ibn al-Nadīm reported that "the Shamanīyah [whose] prophet … is the *Buddha*" (emphasis in original) are "the most exalted people of the earth and the religions" as "the Buddha [taught] them that the principal thing which is illegal and forbidden for a man to believe in and practice is the saying of no (Ar. *lā*), in connection with all things." While it has been suggested that this *lā* is meant to be *anā*, I, which would correspond to the Buddhist dismissal of the concept of 'self,' this passage amply suggests that the author had great sympathy toward Buddhists.[36]

Such cases of proto-parallelism, based on simple intuitive comparisons, were increasingly common for the rest of this period, although direct contacts between Muslims and Buddhists decreased on the Indian subcontinent. Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 957), a prominent Arab historian and geographer, had direct encounters with Buddhists in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Not having proper knowledge of Buddhism, he considered Budasf to be the founder of the Sabean religion, who taught how celestial bodies determined the human destinies of

34 Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 831.

35 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 70.

36 Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 824–5. See also S. M. Yusuf, "The Early Contacts between Islam and Buddhism," *University of Ceylon Review* 13: 1 (1955), 28.

this world, as ordered by God.[37] He considered Budasf to have preached widely, "making himself pass as prophet … with the role of mediator between God and man." While he criticizes the "cult of idols" that Budasf established,[38] it is clear that al-Mas'ūdī resorted to concepts of God and prophethood to describe the Buddha (as if he was a Muslim), since that was the only frame of reference available to him and his Muslim readers.

Where more information on Buddhism was available, the accounts tended to have a slightly more inclusivist tone, making sense of Buddhist teachings from an Islamic perspective. For example, Gardīzī (who wrote in the first half of the eleventh century) described Buddhists as believing in a creator, as well as subscribing to an idea of humanity receiving rewards and punishments, i.e., *karma*, but as rejecting prophets. According to him, Buddhists hold that paradise can be reached through mental exertions, since God has placed in their minds inclinations to good and hatred of evil, thus not needing anybody else.[39] Thus, he attempted to make sense of the atheistic aspect of Buddhist teachings in terms of theism; Buddhists are self-reliant but their strength comes from God!

On the other hand, the *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (The Book of Religious Sects and Philosophical Groups) by al-Shahrastānī (1086–1153), despite being the most extensive account in early Muslim literature on Buddhism, did not show much willingness to locate Buddhism within an Islamic worldview.[40] He treated Buddhists as a subcategory of *barāhima*, calling them the followers of the Buddhas (*bidāda*).[41] Śākyamuni (*shākmīn*) is identified as the first in the succession of Buddhas, who are distinguished by having an unearthly birth, being unmarried, and never eating or drinking, aging or dying. It was also observed that *bodhisattva*s (*būdīs'iyya*) pursue the path of truth by practicing precepts and perfections (*pāramitās*).[42]

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37 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies D'or*, vol. 1, trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, revised and corrected by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962–1997), 199.

38 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies D'or*, vol. 2, trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, revised and corrected by Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962–1997), 523–4.

39 V. Minorsky, "Gardīzī on India," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12: 3–4 (1948), 629–33.

40 Al-Shahrastānī's main source on Buddhism was a report on India commissioned by the Abbasid vizier Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī. Bruce B. Lawrence, "Shahrastānī on Indian Idol Worship," *Studia Islamica* 38 (1973), 64. It is likely to have been the one cited in the work of Ibn al-Nadīm mentioned above.

41 Sarah Stroumsa, "The Barāhima in Early Kalām," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985), 240; Lawrence, *Al-Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions*, 42–3, 108–14.

42 Lawrence, *Al-Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions*, 42–3, 110–12. Tatsuya Kikuchi, "Isurāmu ni okeru budda imēji," *Kokushikan tetsugaku* 7 (2003), 138–48; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 70, 88; Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 177.

Al-Shahrastānī concluded that the Buddha(s) can only be comparable to al-Khiḍr in the Islamic tradition, whom many believe to be a biblical prophet.[43] While this implies that al-Shahrastānī valued some of the Buddhist qualities positively, he did not systematically discuss how the Buddhist tradition can be recognized in terms of Islamic doctrines, dismissing all Indian traditions ultimately as polytheistic.[44] This suggests that he compared the Buddha to al-Khiḍr just to make the former intellectually accessible for his Muslim readers, i.e., based on some parallels he intuitively drew between the two.

1.3 *Early Buddhist Writings*

Compared with early Muslim accounts of Buddhism, early Buddhist references to Islam are rather limited.[45] In what may appear as possible cases of proto-parallelism, earliest Chinese references to Islam tended to call the Muslim object of worship a Buddha, although they seem to have been confused about Muslim practice due to lack of information. On the other hand, the accounts of early pilgrims to India, who probably had first-hand experiences with Muslims, used the term *t'ien* (Heaven), a mainly Confucian concept, to refer to both Islam and the Muslim object of worship.[46] The expansion of Muslim communities during the Song period (960–1279) led to more detailed references to the Islamic tradition, in which God and Prophet Muhammad were often regarded as Buddhas. For example, Zhao Rukuo (1170–1231), a Song official and historian who met Muslim merchants at Quanzhou during his stint in Fujian, describes Arabs as having a Buddha called Ma-hia-we (i.e., Muhammad) and

43 Lawrence, *Al-Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions*, 43, 113–4; Smith, "Early Muslim Accounts," 97. The exact identity of al-Khiḍr, literally "the Green," is not fully established. Some consider him a biblical prophet who appears in the Qur'an, while others think of him simply as a saint or an angel. A. J. Wensinck, "al-Khaḍir (al-Khiḍr)," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

44 Yohanan Friedman, "Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95: 2 (1975), 214.

45 One of the reasons for this is that Buddhism had already lost its power in places where it had direct collective encounters with Muslims. Buddhists simply found their arrival overwhelming. Johan Elverskog, "Islam and Buddhism," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Buswell (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 381; Alexander Berzin, "Buddhist-Muslim Doctrinal Relations: Past, Present and Future," in *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2008), 219–22.

46 Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, 11. This is probably because they had first-hand experience with Muslims whilst on pilgrimage. First-hand information on Islam also came through military encounters with Muslims. Ibid., 20–22.

relates pilgrimage (Ar. *ḥajj*) to the anniversary of the death of the Buddha (i.e., Muhammad), with the Kaʿbah considered to be his house.[47]

Unlike the *Kālacakra Tantra* discussed below, which conveys a sense of confrontation and foreignness, early Chinese sources displayed much less aggressive or reactive attitudes toward Muslims. This may largely be because they were describing Muslims who had settled within their borders or were visiting for trade, whose collective presence was yet to be regarded as a significant socio-cultural other. One twelfth-century Chinese writer connects the Islamic prohibition of eating pork with the instruction their ancestors received from Gautama [Buddha],[48] seemingly trying to make sense of this foreign practice in an inclusivist manner. Yet, as will be seen, toward the end of the Song period the Islamic rule about pork-eating would increasingly be regarded with curiosity and suspicion, eventually serving as a major symbolic tool of differentiation in Chinese discussions of Muslims.

As for the identification of the Muslim object of worship as a Buddha, it is difficult to deny the possibility that it was the result of insufficient knowledge of Islamic teachings. However, the presentations of Muhammad as God may reflect the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion that the Buddha can be a manifestation of the truth (hence an object of worship) as well as a historical teacher. Rather than simple misunderstandings, they may express a spontaneous work of proto-parallelism intuited through the filter of the Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview, which may have encouraged Buddhists to see all highest spiritual beings as Buddhas reflecting the highest truth.

One significant exception to the generally cursory treatment of Islam in early Buddhist writings is the *Kālacakra Tantra*, which partly reflects Buddhist reactions to Muslim military activity on the Indian subcontinent. The *Kālacakra Tantra* is a major product of Indian Vajrayāna Buddhism, composed in the early eleventh century. Its sections on Islam cover such topics as basic Muslim practices, the place of Prophet Muhammad in history, and the nature of God. In the *Tantra*, Muslims are called 'barbarians' (Skt. *mlecchas*, a common term for foreigners who did not follow Indian customs). The term *tāyin*

47 Chao Jukua, *Chao Ju-kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-fan-chi*, trans. Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill (Taipei: Ch'en-Wen Publishing Company, 1967), 116, 124–5.

48 Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China,* 37. There is no Buddhist scripture that specifically forbids the eating of pork. According to the *Vinaya Pitaka* (1: 219–20), for example, the Buddha forbade monastics from eating ten types of meat, but the list does not include pork. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159.

is also used, referring to Muslims who were present in the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent. Describing the Muslim tradition as a violent, iconoclastic religion, the *Tantra* prophesies that a holy war against Muslims will eventually come to pass.[49]

Although this 'holy war' is presented in the *Tantra* as an allegory for personal transformation, that is, the need for internal or spiritual barbarism to be eradicated,[50] such a metaphorical interpretation does not necessarily lessen the negativity with which Islam is portrayed, as it implies that the Muslims are seen as analogous to mental defilements, hence the symbol of all evil, to be eliminated through spiritual training.[51] Either way, for the Buddhists on the Indian subcontinent during this period, the *Tantra* presented Islam as a symbolic arch-enemy of Buddhism, most probably because of the impact of the Muslim military campaigns in India undertaken around the beginning of the eleventh century.[52]

The *Kālacakra Tantra* provides fairly detailed descriptions of Muslim practices and beliefs, but evaluates many of them rather unfavorably.[53] It employs Islamic terms and expressions to describe the tradition, but often presents them negatively, disregarding their original meaning. For example, the Muslim ritual of animal sacrifice is said to be done while reciting the mantra of the

49 John Newman, "Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21: 2 (1998), 318, 326, 328–9. For the range of terms used in Sanskrit sources for Muslims from medieval to pre-modern times, see Brajdulal Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims* (New Delhi: Manobar, 1998).

50 John Newman, "Eschatology in the Wheel of Time Tantra," in *Buddhism in Practice: Abridged Edition*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 203; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 98.

51 Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 192. Indeed, a literal understanding of the *Tantra*'s Shambala prophesies is found in a major Tibetan work from the eighteenth century called *The Crystal Mirror*, which clearly states that Muslims will be annihilated in a physical battle. Roger R. Jackson, *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems: A Tibetan Study of Asian Religious Thought* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 382–4.

52 Some have suggested that the *Tantra* refers to a particular group of Muslims, i.e., Ismā'īlīs. Newman, "Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," 321. For example, Alexander Berzin, a US-born practitioner and teacher of the Vajrayāna tradition, emphasizes that the *Tantra* does not represent a general Buddhist polemic against Muslims. Berzin, "Buddhist-Muslim Doctrinal Relations," 214; Alexander Berzin, "Historical Survey of the Buddhist and Muslim Worlds' Knowledge," *The Muslim World* 100: 2–3 (2010), 191. See Chapter 4 for Berzin's view.

53 Some aspects of the Islamic tradition are commended, such as its rejection of the caste system and the ideal of monogamy in marriage, which is dubbed "asceticism." Newman, "Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," 320.

demonic deity Visavimla ("Withered by Poison"). The latter is a Sanskrit rendering of the Arabic *bismillāh*, which means "in the name of God."[54]

Muslims are said to worship a mighty, merciless, demonic death-deity, ar-Raḥmān (Skt. *rahmaṇ*). This is rather ironic since the word *al-raḥmān* means merciful or compassionate. This ar-Raḥmān is said to be the creator of all animate and inanimate things for the enjoyment of the *tāyin* (i.e., Muslims) and to decide a person's destiny; they go either to heaven or to hell depending on whether they please or displease ar-Raḥmān.[55]

The Buddhist perspective is particularly clear when it comes to Prophet Muhammad, who is said to be the manifestation (Skt. *avatāra*) of ar-Raḥmān.[56] He is described as the seventh on the list of eight prophets whose appearance was prophesied by the Buddha; this prophet "will clearly be born in the city of Baghdad (Skt. *vāgadā*) in the land of Makka (Skt. *makha*), where the demonic incarnation—the mighty, merciless idol of the barbarians—lives in the world."[57]

The *Kālacakra Tantra* constitutes an interesting exception among early Buddhist-Muslim references in that, despite providing a reasonable amount of information on Islam, it draws almost no parallels between Buddhism and Islam. In describing Islam, it tends to use Islamic terms. Virtually the only major instance in which a Buddhist/Indian concept is employed is where Prophet Muhammad is said to be an *avatāra* of God. Yet this does not indicate significant comparability between the two traditions. The absence of parallelism, let alone inclusivism, manifested through the presentation of Islam as

54 Newman, "Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," 323–4. Criticism of the Muslim animal slaughtering ritual is also found in the earliest Tibetan reference to Muslims. Leonard van der Kuijp, "The Earliest Indian Reference to Muslims in a Buddhist Philosophical Text of Circa 700," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 (2006), 196–200; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 99.

55 Newman, "Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," 323. The present section follows Newman's transliteration of the term as "ar-Raḥmān." Ibid., 333.

56 This is most likely a Buddhist attempt to describe Islam using a Buddhist frame of reference. Interestingly, on the Sanskrit side of the bilingual coin of Maḥmūd al-Ghaznī, Prophet Muhammad is called an *avatāra*, while no word with a similar meaning appears on the Arabic side. Edward Thomas, "Supplementary Contributions to the Series of the Coins of the Kings of Ghazní," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 17 (1860), 157–9. It is impossible to tell if Maḥmūd (or Muslims around him) regarded the Prophet as a manifestation of God, where this interpretation originated, or if the *Tantra*'s authors were aware of this designation.

57 Newman, "Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," 320, 323. There is of course a mistake here, since the Prophet was born in Mecca rather than in Baghdad. See also Berzin, "Buddhist and Muslim Worlds' Knowledge," 191–2; Helmut Hoffmann, "Kālacakra Studies I: Manichaeism, Christianity, and Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra," *Central Asiatic Journal* 13: 1 (1969), 57–60.

something wholly different and alien may be attributed to the sense of suspicion toward Muslims, although it cannot be excluded that those Buddhist writers had sufficient knowledge about Islam to describe it without resorting to Buddhist concepts.

2 The Post-Classical Period (1256–1585)

2.1 *Post-Classical Encounters*

Muslims continued expanding their sphere of influence further eastwards in the post-classical period, but there was much less direct military confrontation between Buddhists and Muslims. The Islamization of local Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia was a gradual process mediated often by Sufis, during which Buddhism and Islam were practiced either side by side or in combination. Elsewhere in Persia (under Mongol rule) and China, Buddhist-Muslim relations were affected considerably by political changes in the locality in question.

In Southeast Asia, significant Buddhist-Muslim encounters took place as a result of the direct infiltration of Islam into what is now Malaysia and Indonesia, beginning at the Malay Straits, which constituted one of the world's most cosmopolitan places, thriving on inter-regional sea trade. Sufi brotherhoods, which often had considerable socio-cultural and economic influence like elsewhere, provided crucial channels to the process of cross-influencing and the stages of conversion.[58] By the thirteenth century, some Muslim centers were established in northern Sumatra, from which Islam spread to Java. The other port cities on the other side of the Straits, such as Malacca, soon followed suit. The adoption of Islam was fairly easy in those regions, as the locals had long adopted various syncretic Hindu-Buddhist practices.[59] Toward the end

58 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 545–6, 548–51; Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 101, 127, 147.

59 Green, *Sufism*, 147; M. C. Ricklefs, "Six Centuries of Islamization in Java," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levitzion (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 102; M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia: Since c.1200*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), Ch. 1; Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 545. The birth of Muslim communities in the region is mainly attributed to the activities of Persian merchants who arrived via Gujarat in western India. A possible contribution of Chinese Muslims, especially the Ming admiral Cheng He (see below), to the Islamization of Southeast Asia has also been suggested. See, e.g., Kong Yuanzhi, "On the Relationship between Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia," trans. Liu Kewei, *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 10 (August 2008) https://kyotoreview.org/issue-10/on-the-relationship-between-cheng-ho-and-islam-in-southeast-asia. [accessed 3 December 2021]. For a detailed discussion of the initial Islamization of the Malay

of the sixteenth century, Islam became a dominant religious force in the area ranging from the Malay Peninsula to northern Borneo, with the exceptions solely of eastern Java and Bali.[60]

The Islamization of the northern and eastern parts of the Indian subcontinent (i.e., Kashmir and Bengal) was gradual and partial, with some significant Buddhist presence still remaining today. The Hindu-Buddhist region of Kashmir became officially Muslim in the fourteenth century.[61] Traditional Indian religiosity continued largely in the mystical strands of Islam in the region.[62] Buddhism survived much longer in East Bengal under the Buddhist Pala kings. As in the early Islamization of India, Buddhists in Bengal regarded Muslims as offering deliverance from persecution by Hindus.[63] The conversion was also facilitated by Sufism, which was influenced considerably by Hindu-Buddhist elements.[64] For example, a high degree of syncretization between Islamic and Indian practices is seen in the development of the popular pantheon, which included Sufi and other Muslim saints as well as metamorphosed Hindu and Buddhist divinities.[65]

Following the Mongol conquests of the early thirteenth century, Buddhism was reintroduced into Persia by the Mongol Il-khanid dynasty (1256–1353). The Mongol Khans, who were themselves Buddhists,[66] patronized Buddhism until Ghazan Khan (ruled 1295–1304) embraced Islam in 1295.[67] During this

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world, see Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), Chs. 1–4.

60 Reat, *Buddhism*, 103; Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 470.

61 Aziz Ahmad, "Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir," *Central Asiatic Journal* 23 (1979): 3–18; Sarla Khosla, *History of Buddhism in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1972), 78–80.

62 One notable example of such syncretic religious expressions is the words of Lalla, a fifteenth-century Muslim mystic in Kashmir. Khosla, *History of Buddhism*, 80.

63 Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 33; Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, 345.

64 For Buddhist elements found in the mosques built during the Bengal Sultanate (1338–1538), see Perween Hasan, "Sultanate Mosques and Continuity in Bengal Architecture," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989), 58–74.

65 Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 50–51.

66 The Mongol rulers embraced a great mixture of Buddhist traditions, such as Uyghur, Tangut, and Chinese, and later Kashmiri and Tibetan, as well as the native ancestral tradition centered around shamanism. On the presence of shamanic rituals at the Mongol court, see, e.g., Deweese, *Islamization and Native Religion*, 204.

67 Prior to this, in 1254, a public debate was organized by the Mongol Khan at Karakorum between representatives of Muslims and, among Christians, of the Church of the East (commonly yet incorrectly dubbed Nestorians) and Roman Catholics, as well as Buddhists. The general outcome of this debate was that the former three won over the Buddhists

brief period, Buddhists in Persia enjoyed Il-khan's favor along with Christians and Jews, undertaking an enthusiastic temple-building program. Even after Ghazan's conversion to Islam, Buddhism did not disappear immediately, as also shown from the unsuccessful attempts of Buddhists to reconvert Uljaytu Khan (ruled 1305–16) to Buddhism.[68]

Over in China, the settlement of Muslims was complete during the Yuan period (1279–1368), and the process of their acculturation culminated in the Ming period (1368–1644).[69] Muslims were generally favored by Mongol rulers. However, Muslims, particularly Chinese-speaking ones (now commonly called Hui or Huihui people), often suffered discrimination from the authorities due to their custom of eating *ḥalāl* meat.[70] The antagonism between Han Chinese and Hui became particularly prominent in the Ming period.[71] Despite the generally unfavorable treatment they received, Muslims residing in China steadily integrated themselves into the main fabric of Chinese society.[72] As the Neo-Confucian campaign gained momentum, Muslims in western China constructed mosques in the guise of Chinese Buddhist temples, typically without minarets.[73]

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with monotheistic arguments: R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 48–51; Michael Pye, "Bukkyō to kirisutokyō tono de'ai," in *Bukkyō to kirisutokyō no taiwa: jōdo shinshū to fukuinshugi shingaku*, eds. Hans-Martin Baart, Michael Pye, and Eryō Minoura (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2000), 11.

68 Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism* (London: British Library, 1994), 203; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 140–41.

69 For more, see Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 167; Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 31–51.

70 Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, 89; Chō, *Kaikyō*, 39–41. For Mongol rulers' policies toward Muslim practices, especially the *ḥalāl* slaughtering method, see Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 227–41.

71 For Muslim rebellions in this period, see Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, 129f.

72 Muslims continued to play a major role in foreign trade, as exemplified in the active career of Cheng He (traveled 1405–33). This Muslim eunuch admiral carried out extensive voyages to other parts of Asia and North Africa. Symbolic of this cross-cultural mission is the tri-lingual stele he erected in Sri Lanka; the inscription pays homage to Buddha, Shiva, and God in Chinese, Tamil, and Persian respectively. Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405–1433* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 112–3. The Ming government's turnaround on the active engagement in trade in the mid-fifteenth century, on the other hand, facilitated the acculturation of Muslims further. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 41–6.

73 For more details, see Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 168f; Jill Cowen, "Dongdasi of Xian: A Mosque in the Guise of a Buddhist Temple," *Oriental Art* 19: 2 (1983), 134–47; Michael Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 119.

2.2 *Post-Classical Muslim Writings*

Muslim literature on Buddhism from the post-classical period includes travel records,[74] theological writings,[75] and histories.[76] Although these accounts are often detailed, they continue to use Islamic categories to describe Buddhism. What is most notable about the Muslim literature on Buddhism from this period is the efforts that Persian historians made to locate Buddhism in an Islamic schema.

Although they did not employ a systematic doctrinal perspective, some Persian writers seem to have tried to situate Buddhism in their works of world history, thereby developing an inclusivist approach. This is attributable to the significant presence of Buddhists in Il-khanid Persia, although Muslim reactions to Mongol rule were highly diverse.[77] For example, ʻAlā ʻal-Dīn ʻAṭā-Malik Juvainī (1226–1283) describes some aspects of Buddhist teachings in *Tarikh-i Jahan-gushay-i* (The History of Conquering the World). While not providing a systematic account of Buddhism, Juvainī at one point praises Buddhists (*toyin*) as inculcating a virtuous life, saying that Buddhist teachings resemble the views and doctrines of all prophets.[78] Coupled with his designation of Buddhism as "idolatry" elsewhere,[79] Juvainī's recognition of Buddhist teachings resembling the message of prophets can be said to reflect the *dīn al-fiṭrah* thinking.

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74 For example, Ibn Battuta (1304–1377), a renowned traveler from Morocco, seems to have met Buddhists in India, Southeast Asia, and China: Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, vol. 4, trans. with revision and notes, H. A. R. Gibb (Banham, Norfolk: Archival Facsimiles Ltd, 1995), Chs. 21, 22.

75 More detailed evaluation of Buddhism was undertaken by theologians such as Ibn Taimiyya (1263–1328), who expresses a fairly strong criticism of Buddhists (*toyin*), regarding them as committing *shirk* (associating God with something else). Yahya Michot, "A Mamluk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's Risala Adhawiyya," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14: 3 (2003), 339–41; Yayha Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translations of Three Fatwas," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11: 2 (2000), 194. The term *toyin* is considered to have derived from the Chinese term *tao-jen*, which means people of the Way (Dao), i.e., Daoists.

76 There is no substantial Muslim reference to the Buddhist tradition in the north and east of India and Southeast Asia, areas that were finally Islamized. This may partly be because distinctions between Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as between these two and Islam, were somewhat blurred. This was in turn due to there being a great deal of syncretism between these traditions, and the process being generally peaceful and gradual.

77 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 143.

78 Buddha Prakash, "Fazlullah Rashid-ud-Din Abul Khair," in *Historians of Medieval India*, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (Meerut: Meenaksh Prakashan, 1968), 16; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 137–8.

79 The term is used in the context of the Uyghurs' conversion to Buddhism. Deweese, *Islamization and Native Religion*, 172.

The most ostensible attempt to locate Buddhism in an Islamic worldview and history is found in the *Jāmiʿ al-Tavārīkh* (Compendium of Chronicles, finished in around 1305/6), by Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allah (1247–1318), a medic-scholar who hailed from a Jewish family.[80] It was commissioned by Uljaytu Khan (reigned 1304–16)[81] and has a section entitled "Life and Teaching of Buddha," a most extensive Muslim account of Buddhism before the contemporary period. It was prepared in collaboration with a Kashmiri Buddhist monk called Kāmalashrī Bakhshī.[82] The section discusses the life of Śākyamuni Buddha and Buddhist teachings, such as the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, the Hinayāna ("the sect of the *Śrāvakas* and *Pratyakabuddhas*") /Mahāyāna ("the sect of the *Samyaksambuddhas*") distinction, and the appearance of the future Buddha Maitreya.[83]

As in early Muslim accounts of Buddhism, the Buddhist tradition is described in terms familiar to Muslims.[84] The historical Buddha is portrayed as a prophet with a Book (the *Abhidharma*, a body of scholastic discussions of the Buddha's teachings, which however is not considered by Buddhists to be the Buddha's words) and a special divine mission.[85] He is described to be the prophet of mercy, compassion, and kindness (Ar. *lutf*), which are key divine attributes.[86] He is also seen to set the path of *sunnah* (tradition, exemplary model), as Prophet Muhammad has done, and even to guide his followers onto

80 As a convert, he perhaps felt the need to demonstrate his Islamic orthodoxy and respectability through serious theological writing.

81 Karl Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India: Collected Essays with Facsimiles and Indices* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), i.

82 Ibid., xxxii-xxxiii. For his project Rashīd al-Dīn also had two Chinese Buddhist informants, who assisted him on Chinese history: Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 92; Stefan Kamola, *Making Mongol History: Rashid al-Din and the Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 97. They may have also provided information on Buddhism. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 149.

83 Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India,* xxxvii, lv and following. For the types of Buddhism covered in the work, see Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 151–2, 157. Hinayāna (meaning small vehicle), a derogatory label devised by its critics, was used as a blanket term to refer to non-Mahāyāna strands of Buddhism, although it is common to use Theravāda nowadays (see Chapters 1 and 2).

84 Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India*, xxxiv; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 154.

85 Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India*, xxxv–xxxviii; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 156.

86 Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 184. However, the term used for the Buddha and the leaders of other Indian religions is *nabī* (prophet), and not *rasūl* (messenger), which is of more importance. Ibid., 181. This suggests that some conscious distinction was made between the significance of the Buddha and that of Prophet Muhammad, who seals the chain of prophets.

"the straight path" (Ar. *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*), a fundamental Qur'anic expression found in the *fātiḥah* (the opening chapter of the Qur'an).[87]

The work also shows clear efforts to incorporate Buddhism into the history of Islam and its theological perspective, in order to facilitate Muslim readers' appreciation of Buddhism.[88] All the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina before their acceptance of Islam are said to have been Buddhists who worshipped in the Ka'bah idols resembling Buddha.[89] Furthermore, the historical Buddha is referred to as working at the command of the Exalted Creator, God, who commanded him to build temples in order to house his (i.e., Śākyamuni's) images.[90]

Thus, one can identify a pattern of attempting to present Buddhism highly favorably, and as closely connected to Islam. Such authors virtually accepted the Buddhist practice of venerating statues as something willed by God, albeit by presenting it as a pre-Islamic practice that would eventually be corrected with the advent of Islam.[91] In particular, Rashīd al-Dīn's effort as a historian to properly locate Buddhism, which had a significant presence in his country, within the history of Islam may also have been influenced by his personal sympathy toward Buddhists, with whom he must have been in regular contact.[92] Finally, considering that the Il-khanid patronage of Buddhism had come to an end a few years before the completion of the work, it is not unlikely that his Buddhist informant had a political agenda, perhaps hoping to court favor with Muslims by approximating Buddhist teachings to those of Islam. Although it is impossible to know exactly what was behind their approach, collectively or individually, this extensive account of Buddhism suggests that a circumstance in which Buddhists have social and political significance in a given locality, coupled with Muslims having detailed first-hand information on the Buddhist tradition found there, could encourage Muslims to accord a positive place to Buddhism in an Islamic worldview.[93] Clearly, however, this

87 Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 184.

88 Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India*, xxxiv. The concept of Ādi Buddha may have been instrumental in showing the idea of God present in Buddhism. Ibid., lxiv-lxv.

89 Ibid., xl. This may have drawn on a view circulating in the Islamic world since the ninth century that Arabian idolatry originated in India. Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 187.

90 Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India,* lxxiv; Prakash, "Fazlulla Rashid-ud-Din," 17–8; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 156–7.

91 Indeed, no criticism is made in the text toward the Buddhist practice of 'idol worship.' Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 186–7.

92 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 149.

93 See also Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 188. The possibility that the authors attempted to convey a positive impression of Buddhism to their Muslim audience is also seen in some of the illustrations that accompanied the text. For example, the Buddha is

particularly favorable situation was more an exception than the rule in the history of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.[94]

2.3 *Post-Classical Buddhist Writings*

Compared with Muslim accounts of Buddhism, Buddhist writings on Islam from the post-classical period did not show significant developments. Most Buddhist accounts of Islam from this period in the Indo-Tibetan tradition mainly preserved the negative views expressed in the early period.[95] Some stories were fabricated, based on the image of Muslims as a threat to Buddhists.[96] For example, in the *Blue Annals*, a chronicle of the Tibetan tradition, a monk called Grags-pa sen-ge (b. 1283) is said to have given up his plans to go to India because he was told that Buddhism in India had declined, and that "Turuskas" (Muslim Turks) may harm him.[97]

Over in China, where the knowledge of Islam improved somewhat thanks to the increased social and political presence of Muslims in this period, the

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depicted as 'fully dressed' (wearing a long robe, a hat, and a cape), rather than with one shoulder bare as per Buddhist monastic custom, which would not have been deemed respectable to the Muslim sensibility. Akasoy, "The Buddha and the Straight Path," 180–81; Sheila R. Canby, "Depictions of Buddha Sakyamuni in the Jami' al-Tavarikh and the Majma' al-Tavarikh," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 302.

94 Later Muslim sources ceased to provide much information on the tradition of the Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhists inhabiting Central Asia, typically dismissing them as infidels (Ar. *kāfir*, *kuffār* in plural). Ron Sela, "Central Asian Muslims on Tibetan Buddhism, 16th-18th Centuries," in *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition*, ed. Roberto Vitali (Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 2014), 348–9. Yet the idea that Buddha Śākyamuni was a prophet seems to have been commonly held. Paralleling the list of Buddhas with the Muslim list of prophets, for example, Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat (wrote in the mid-sixteenth century), the governor of Kashmir, reported that Buddhists regard "Jána Kasapa" (probably a mistake for Maitreya, as Kassapa is the last Buddha before Śākyamuni) as the last of the 124,000 prophets who is yet to come. He claims they are mistaken on the ground that the last Prophet (i.e., Muḥammad) has already appeared. Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haidar, Dughlát*: *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, ed. Ney Elias and trans. Edward Denison Ross (Patna: Academica Asiatica, 1898, 1973), 415–6.

95 One exception to this is Bu-ston (who wrote in 1322), who does not refer to Muslims when discussing the decline of the Buddhist tradition. Bu-ston, *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, trans. E. Obermiller, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1986).

96 Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, 346. A rare example of an account based on first-hand witness of Muslims is provided by Dharmasvāmin (Tib: Chag lo-tsa-ba chos-rje-dpal), a Tibetan monk who traveled to India in 1234. George Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin* (Patna: K. T. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959), esp. 93–4, 98.

97 George Roerich, *The Blue Annals: The Stages of the Appearance of the Doctrine and Preachers in the Land of Tibet*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1953), 526.

Buddhist-Muslim proto-parallelism continued in the Chinese accounts of West Asia, as well as those of Muslims within their borders. An early-thirteenth-century account of the "Foreign Pagoda" (i.e., mosque) in the country observes that "barbarians climb at daybreak to its peak and call the Buddha's name, praying for a response," assuming the Muslim call to prayer to be an evocation of the Buddha.[98] Similarly in the official history of the Yuan rule (written in the mid-fourteenth century), the city of Mecca, now called by the Chinese term *t'ien-fang* ("direction of Heaven," which also refers to the Ka'bah), was still considered to be where the Prophet's grave could be located.[99] Given the increased knowledge about Islam in this period, it is impossible to regard such persistent associations between God or Prophet Muhammad with the Buddha solely as the result of misunderstanding.

The increased awareness of the Muslim presence also led to negative attitudes toward Muslims among non-Muslim Chinese. Particularly notable is the bitter sentiment triggered by the official recognition that Muslims gained during the Yuan rule. An extremely offensive and scornful story, attributed to Song loyalist Cheng Ssu-hsiao (1239–1316), describes Muslims as descended from pigs. Although the authorship has been questioned, this account reflects Han Chinese hostility toward Muslims during this period.[100]

3 The Modern Period (1585–1947)

3.1 *Modern Encounters*

Buddhist-Muslim engagements in the modern period is largely a continuation of the earlier coexistence, with some variation due to socio-political developments. In some South and Southeast Asian countries, it was sometimes affected by the policies of their colonizers, especially after European colonial dominance was fully established in the nineteenth century. Tibetan Buddhist regions witnessed considerable integration of Muslims into what was a predominantly Buddhist society, whereas in China the accelerated marginalization of Muslims led to various uprisings.

Buddhist-Muslim coexistence in the modern period was generally peaceful in South and Southeast Asia. Islamization made further progress in the Malay

98 Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China* , 41.

99 Ibid., 91. Yet, he was not called a Buddha, but "the Heavenly Messenger, the divine *hu*, called Pi-yen-ra-erth": ibid. This term is probably the Persian *paighambar*, meaning "the Messenger."

100 Ibid., 92–3; Kazutada Kataoka, "Mochitsuzukerareru henken," *Ajia yūgaku* 30 (2001), 114–5.

world, and by the seventeenth century populations of the inland areas of the islands had also embraced Islam. With the Sufi teachings dominating across the region, the Islamic inroads continued to produce highly indigenized forms of practice.[101] Inter-regional trade also remained a significant channel of new encounters, making Southeast Asia a major locus of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. For example, a sizable Muslim community, mainly consisting of those of an Iranian Shi'a background, developed in the Ayutthaya Kingdom in the seventeenth century. Muslim traders held major posts under the Siamese rulers, most notably those within the important ministry dedicated to maritime trading affairs (Thai: *phra klang*), for generations.[102] The Persian-Siamese connection unfolded also on a diplomatic level, as Ayutthaya sent embassies to the court of Safavid Persia in response to which Shah Sulayman (r. 1666–94) sent an envoy to the king of Ayutthaya Narai (r. 1656–88) in 1686.[103] Thanks to the prosperity of the Shi'a community in this period, and the favor and prestige Muslims received from the king, Islamic practices were regarded positively by the generally Buddhist populace, leading to some conversions.[104]

As many countries in South and Southeast Asia became colonized by the European powers, Buddhists and Muslims turned the primary focus of their attention away from each other to Christianity, the religion of their new rulers. Where coexistence was already established, Muslims and Buddhists sometimes helped each other stand against European colonizers. In Sri Lanka, for example, the Kandyan kings protected Muslims when their role in coastal

101 Thomas Patrick Hughes, *The Dictionary of Islam* (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1982), 620. The regions newly Islamized in this period include Lombok. Sven Cederroth, "From Ancestor Worship to Monotheism: Politics of Religion in Lombok," *Temenos* 32 (1996), 9; Ricklefs, "Six Centuries of Islamization," 107–8. For the hybrid nature of Islamic practice developed during this period, see Howard M. Federspiel, *Sultans, Shamans, and Saints: Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), Ch. 3.

102 They were responsible for the Indian Ocean trade, taking advantage of the growing Iranian settlement in the Shi'a kingdom of the Qutb-Shahi dynasty in South India. M. Ismail Marcinkowski, "The Iranian-Siamese Connection: An Iranian Community in the Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya," *Iranian Studies* 35: 1–3 (2002), 30–34. The lineage of the influential Bunnag family of Thailand goes back to Shaykh Ahmad, a prominent Shi'a Persian figure at the Siamese court. He also assumed the role of the first *shaykh al-islām* in Thailand, while his descendants converted to Buddhism in the mid-eighteenth century. Marcinkowski, "The Iranian-Siamese Connection," 34, 42–6; Tomoko Morikawa, "Safavīchō no taishamu shisetsu to indoyō: 'sureimān no fune' no sekai," in *Shihō* 46 (2013), 2.

103 Morikawa, "Safavīchō no taishamu shisetsu," 5; Marcinkowski, "The Iranian-Siamese Connection," 34–5.

104 Most notably, the annual Ashura procession is said to have been supported by the king. Marcinkowski, "The Iranian-Siamese Connection," 39–40.

trade was threatened by the Portuguese and the Dutch.[105] When the colonial government favored one over the other, however, it often disturbed the peaceful coexistence that local Buddhists and Muslims had hitherto enjoyed. Moreover, resistance against colonial rule sometimes developed into nationalism, accompanied by the revival of a dominant local ethnic group's religion, thereby affecting Buddhist-Muslim relations in the locality. This was particularly true of anti-colonial Buddhist revival movements.[106] For example, Buddhists attacked mosques and looted Muslim markets in central Sri Lanka in the so-called Gampola Perahara incident in 1915. This clash is understood to be part of growing Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, rather than the result of bad blood between Buddhists and Muslims in the area.[107] In Southeast Asia, the British introduction of South Asian workers caused considerable resistance. A salient example is the series of anti-Muslim riots that happened in the 1930s in Burma, where the anti-colonial nationalist ethos escalated due to dissatisfaction with the downgrading of the status of Buddhism under colonial rule.[108] The cosmopolitan spirit of cultural accommodation which had long characterized the Malay world was also affected by the strong distinctions the British made between socio-ethnic classes, which would become the basis of ethnically-defined state policies of the post-independence Malaysian state.[109] Over in Siam, the efforts of centralization in its state-building process against

105 Muslims were also given lands for mosques and were encouraged to practice their religion. Mahinda Deegalle, "Creating Space for the Non-Buddhists in Sri Lanka: A Buddhist Perspective on the Other," in *Hermeneutical Explorations in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Hans Ucko*, eds. Anantanand Rambachan, A. Rashied Omar and M. Thomas Thangaraj (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 121–3; Mohan, "Islam in Sri Lanka," 115–7.

106 Frydenlund and Jerryson, "Buddhists, Muslims and the Construction of Difference," 280.

107 George Rowell, "Ceylon's Kristallnacht: A Reassessment of the Pogrom of 1915," *Modern Asian Studies* 43: 3 (2009), 619–48. For the background of this incident, see also Kōji Kawashima, *Suriranka to minzoku* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2006), esp. Ch. 2. Indeed, Muslims returned to their pro-Buddhist position in the 1930s, after a brief period of siding first with the British and then with the Tamils.

108 Matthew J. Walton, "Buddhist-Muslim Interactions in Burma/Myanmar," in *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, eds. Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 82–6. The "Indo-Burman antagonism" that unfolded within the religiously pluralistic ethos of colonial Burma had both economic and cultural dimensions. See Nile Green, "Buddhism, Islam and the Religious Economy of Colonial Burma," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 46: 2 (2015), 175–204.

109 Farish A. Noor, "Pluralism Before and After the State: Religious Diversity and Difference in Malaysia from the Premodern Era to the Present," in *ASEAN Religious Pluralism: The Challenges of Building a Socio-Cultural Community*, ed. Imtiyaz Yusuf (Bangkok: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014), 106–20; Rita Camilleri, "Religious Pluralism in Malaysia: The Journey of Three Prime Ministers," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24: 3 (2013), 226–7.

the British presence, especially in the Malay Muslim region to the south of its territory, sowed the seeds of the subsequent political struggle between Malay Muslims and the Thai state.[110]

In the Tibetan Buddhist regions of Tibet and Ladakh, Buddhist-Muslim coexistence made headway,[111] as more Muslim traders from northern India, especially Kashmir, started to settle in the region.[112] These Muslims (Tib. *kha-che*) intermarried with Tibetans and adopted various Tibetan customs. It is held among Tibetans that the small Muslim minority in Tibet was granted full recognition and certain rights by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682).[113] In the beginning of the eighteenth century, Chinese Muslims (Ch. *hui*, Tib: *gya-kha-che*) also settled in Lhasa, building their first mosque there in 1716.[114]

As Muslims came to form an integral part of Chinese society during the seventeenth century, cultural confrontation between Islam and the Chinese Confucians continued, contributing to the marginalization of the Muslims in the country.[115] From the late Ming period onwards, the Han-Hui tension accelerated greatly, leading the government to issue a number of decrees against Muslim customs (especially regarding animal slaughter). While Qing rulers (1644–1911) did not persecute Muslims to start with,[116] social marginalization furthered by their change of policies led to a succession of revolts amongst Muslim communities in western China in the 1860s and 1870s, notably those from the Jahriyya group, a Sufi movement with a revivalist inclination initially

110 Frydenlund and Jerryson, "Buddhists, Muslims and the Construction of Difference," 278. See Chapter 3 on Buddhist-Muslim relations in Malaysia and Thailand.

111 However, Central Asia saw a few violent confrontations when the Timurids (1370–1506) and the Mughals attempted to subjugate Buddhists in the surrounding areas. See, e.g., Dughlat, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, 52, 348–9; G. M. D. Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1979), 275; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 175–9.

112 Corneille Jest, "Kha-Che and Gya-Kha-Che, Muslim Communities in Lhasa (1990)," *Tibet Journal* 20: 3 (1995), 8–9.

113 Jose Ignacio Cabezon, "Islam in Tibetan Cultural Sphere," in *Islam in Tibet and Tibetan Caravans*, eds. Abdul Wahid Radhu et al. (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1997), 17; Ataullah Siddiqui, "Muslims of Tibet," *Tibet Journal* 16: 4 (1991), 74–5.

114 Jest, "Kha-Che," 10–11. Muslims often took up butchery in Tibet, providing meat for Buddhists who would refrain from killing because of their precepts. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 240.

115 By the beginning of Qing rule, Chinese Muslims were found all across the country, concentrated in the north-west, south-west, and eastern cities. While they were socially integrated, the difference continued to be felt, rendering Muslims the cultural other. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 56.

116 Kataoka, "Mochitsuzukerareru henken," 116–8; Chō, *Kaikyō*, 48f; Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, 124–5; Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 244; Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 97–101.

led by Ma Mingxin (1718–81).[117] The sense of collective alienation between Buddhists and Muslims seems to have developed significantly during the Qing period, as the rulers made a clear distinction between Buddhists, i.e., Mongols, Chinese, and Manchu, on the one hand, and Muslims on the other. This predicament encouraged Mongols and Tibetans to reinforce their anti-Muslim sentiment on account of the *ḥalāl* slaughtering practice.[118]

Chinese Muslims lived by double standards, conforming to the sociocultural norms of the Chinese in public, while retaining their Islamic spirituality in private.[119] In their attempt to negotiate their cultural identities and to train younger generations in Islamic learning, they developed the "scripture hall education" system, where the curriculum involved the study of Confucian classics as well as Buddhist and philosophical Daoist materials. Such an indigenized approach to understanding and presenting Islam is amply reflected in the written tradition established by Sino-Muslim scholars, collectively called *han kitab*.[120]

3.2 *Modern Muslim Writings*

Muslim literature on Buddhism did not expand much in the modern period, perhaps due to the absence of new large-scale encounters. As will be seen in the following examples from the Malay Islamic world, the Ayutthaya Kingdom, and China, however, there is a considerable variety among the perspectives

117 Chō, *Kaikyō*, 58f, 121f. For other movements, see Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 170f. For an account of how the Jahriyya movement became the center of Muslim rebellion in China, see Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 245–51; Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, Ch. 3.

118 Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 251–5. The Islamically prescribed procedure of producing *ḥalāl* meat means that the animal's throat is cut open with a sharp knife to let out the blood while the *basmalah* is recited.

119 Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 169–70.

120 For the development of the scripture hall education system and of the *han kitab* genre, see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Kristian Petersen, *Interpreting Islam in China: Pilgrimage, Scripture and Language in the Han Kitab* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). The process through which Islam took root in China by incorporating Buddhist and Daoist elements can also be gleaned from contemporary Hui practice on the ground. For example, a group of Qadiriyya Sufis in Ningxia venerate Fatima, the wife of the fourth caliph Ali, as "true mother" in a form that resembles Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara). Mian Weiling, *Ningxia yisilan jiaopai garyao* (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Publishing Society, 1981), 102, quoted in Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1996), 352, see note 127.

found across different localities, reflecting the differing nature of the engagements as well as the extent of familiarity that the writers had with Buddhism.

In the modern period, Muslim scholars in Muslim-majority regions tended to repeat earlier accounts of non-Muslim traditions, including Buddhism.[121] The most notable example of this 'recycled tradition' is provided by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1658), a prominent Malay Sufi scholar originally hailing from Gujarat. Following the model adopted in al-Shahrastānī's work,[122] al-Rānīrī seems to refer to Buddhists under two categories, while avoiding identifying them as Buddhist.[123]

The first category is "the third sect of Zoroastrians," called *Samiyyah*, who are said to be found in Tibet. According to the writer, they worship "all kinds of light," holding "that all light originated from one light." This is said to be actually the Light of God, which was separated into different lights when He brought Creation into existence.[124] This may correspond to the idea that the message of God was disseminated by different prophets, one of whom could have taught Buddhism. The second category is that of "materialists," who believe that the "universe is eternal" and have "no Creator." The author observes that the "Srāvaka people" living in Gujarat belong to this sect, associating with them the doctrine of *karma* and reincarnation and the concept of *nirvāṇa*.[125]

It appears that al-Rānīrī continues the early Muslim tendency of simply categorizing Buddhists with labels used for different groups of Muslims. While he does not possess a systematic knowledge of Buddhism, he does not seem to dismiss Buddhists altogether. Indeed, he makes some unorthodox attempts to acknowledge Indian religions, for example by tracing the origin of the term

121 Even Rashīd al-Dīn's work, although widely known, did not stimulate further productivity. Jahn, *Rashīd Al-Dīn's History of India*, c. Muslims' knowledge of Buddhism would only start to improve when Western scholarship on Buddhism became available toward the end of the period. See Karel Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion by Indonesian Muslims: A Survey," *NUMEN* 37 (1990), 147f.

122 However, it is not his immediate source. Steenbrink, "Study of Comparative Religion," 143.

123 Al-Ranīrī was part of major doctrinal debates among Sufis in Southeast Asia and is known for his criticism of Hamzah Fansuri (writing in the latter half of the seventeenth century), a prominent Malay Sufi scholar. Fansuri seems to have spent his formative years in the Ayutthaya Kingdom and to have learned mysticism from the Persians there, which highlights the dynamic cosmopolitan ethos of the period in the region. Marcinkowski, "The Iranian-Siamese Connection," 27–9. For Fansuri's thought, see Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1966).

124 Mohd Rushdan bin Mohd Jailani, "An Annotated Translation and Transliteration of *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān* of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī" (MA diss., International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Kuala Lumpur, 2003), 49.

125 Ibid., 51–2.

Brahman to Abraham, thereby recognizing Hinduism as a religion of the Book.[126] Al-Rānīrī's willingness to acknowledge some validity in Indian religions, including Buddhism, may derive from his sympathy for the traditions predominant in his native land, and the continuing interactions that Muslims had with traditional Hindu/Buddhists in the Malay world during the modern period.

An observation on Buddhism, made by the scribe for the Persian envoy to the kingdom of Ayutthaya at the end of the seventeenth century, on the other hand, displays a rather straightforward contempt toward this foreign tradition. Muhammad Rabi' ibn Muhammad Ibrahim categorically dismisses the Siamese as belonging to the group of human beings who are "most blind and hopelessly gone astray" in not regarding the world as having a Creator and not following a particular form of divine law or divinely specified practice.[127] The absence of a divine law means that no prophet has been sent to this part of the world, indicating that Buddhism (as practiced in Siam) is outside the divine scheme. The writer is particularly critical of the doctrine of transmigration and the widespread practice of "idolatry" among the locals.[128] Quoting the rationale for "idolatry" provided by "[t]he scholars of Siam," the writer declares the Siamese practice as exactly the same as the "evil practices" of the Arabs condemned in

126 Karel Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596–1960*, trans. Jan Steenbrink and Henry Jansen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991, 1993), 128–9; Karel Steenbrink, "Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Writings of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 1: 2 (1990), 198.

127 Muhammad Rabi' ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, trans. John O'Kane (London and New York: Routledge, 1972), 111.

128 Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 111–5. An interesting difference is made here between the "Hindus," who are "the best of those peoples" and believe in transmigration thanks to their practice of non-violence, vegetarianism, and asceticism, and the Siamese, who are "the worst of these peoples and more vain [sic.] in their meaningless practices than all the rest": ibid., 113. While it is not clear if "Hindus" refers to followers of Hindu traditions or Indians in general, the author is clearly aware of the diversity among the 'idol worshipping' peoples. Morikawa, "Safavīchō no taishamu shisetsu," 26. The extremely unfavorable depiction of Siamese religiosity, especially how the author emphasizes its abnormality, seems to contradict the more sober account of Buddhist monks provided later, who are described as being required to have no "animal lusts" and to "renounce this world with all its false pleasures": Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 116. Although this could suggest an ascetic element, the author describes the monks upon withdrawing themselves from this-worldly concerns as being "dedicated themselves to the works and rites of idolatry." Ibid., 115. This judgment may reflect the extreme alienness that the author may have perceived in the Siamese devotion to the veneration of Buddha statues, while it is also possible that compared with the ascetic training undertaken by Indian yogis the Buddhist monastic practice simply did not appear particularly rigorous to him.

the Qur'an with the words: "[t]he idols are [their] intercessors before God and [their] means of approaching the Lord of lords."[129] Monastic practice is similarly rejected as "sheer nonsense" and an expression of "moral error."[130] What is particularly notable is the fact that, despite its fairly detailed nature, especially on the life of monks who are identified as "*rūlī*s,"[131] the account makes no mention of the Buddha, either as the model of the "idols" worshipped at temples or as the teacher of the doctrine of transmigration, let alone as the spiritual state that monks aspire to achieve. As the account is likely to have been based on the author's first-hand witness of the local practice, as well as what he heard from officials and scholars, both Siamese and non-Siamese, it is hard to imagine that he never heard about the Buddha. One possible reason for this peculiar lack of attention given to the Buddha may be that this Persian writer was so overwhelmed by the diffusion of "idolatry" among the people, who would worship everything except the creator God ("from the fabled fish that props up the world to the moon that glides through the heavens … [and even] … certain land and sea animals")[132] that he failed to recognize the symbolic centrality of the Buddha. Indeed, one can get the impression that he was unable to discern a systematic doctrine out of the diverse information he received, when he stated: "In fact they do not adhere to any fixed doctrine but will admit into their creed whatever is convenient."[133]

The Persian writer's dismissive attitude toward Siamese Buddhist tradition may be attributable to him being an outsider with no personal involvement with the Buddhists he describes. This would also explain the general lack of willingness to relate to Buddhism doctrinally, most notably the absence of reference to prophethood. Yet it is remarkable how even such a confused and biased account of Buddhism does provide a modicum of proto-parallelism, for example between the way the Siamese prostrate to the king and the prostration

129 Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 114.

130 Ibid., 115–6.

131 Ibid., 115, 117. The original Thai term which is rendered as *rūlī* here may be *ruesi* (deriving from the Sanskrit term *rishi*). It refers to hermits or wise holy men and can sometimes be used for Buddhist monks known for their psychic or magical powers.

132 Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 114.

133 Ibid. There is surely the possibility that the locals did not discriminate much among the range of their objects of worship, including the Buddha, especially on the popular level. However, this would not explain entirely why he did not refer to the Buddha at all, since his presentation of the basic Buddhist worldview is generally accurate. For example, he describes Buddhists as being "devoted to the general process of fate and time" (ibid., 115). His remark that "despite the clear deficiency of their own beliefs" the educated Siamese he conversed with "regard[ed] everyone else as 'infidels'" (ibid., 113) further suggests that he discussed Buddhism with them.

performed during collective Muslim prayer.[134] Furthermore, the concept of Buddhahood, although no Buddhist term is used, is understood within an Islamic scheme. Noting that "[s]ome Siamese … say that 'God manifests Himself in the form of various persons,'" Ibrahim suggests seeing this statement "with the eye of truth," thereby completing it thus: "Though God's full beauty is hidden from our sight, it is partly visible in everything we behold."[135] Here, the Buddhist conception of immanence (or the human potential to become a Buddha) is compared to the Islamic notion of *āyah* (meaning sign, i.e., of God, namely the idea that God is manifested in the phenomenal world; see Chapter 1). Thus, despite his strong criticism of the Siamese for lacking a belief in a creator God (or the day of judgment or resurrection),[136] this Persian writer suggests the possibility that Buddhist teachings are partially compatible with the Islamic worldview.

A more thoroughgoing attempt at doctrinal engagement with Buddhism is found in Burma, especially in Rangoon, where Indian Muslims thrived as a competition unfolded among different religious communities once the 'non-interference' policy of the colonial government placed Buddhism, which had been protected and controlled by the Burmese state, on a par with non-Buddhist traditions after the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885.[137] *Sayr-e Barhma* (Burmese Journey) was written in 1893 by an Indian Muslim leader named 'Abd al-Khaliq, who had lived in Burma for several years. Intended for a readership of fellow Muslim scholars, this Urdu booklet aims at refuting the "religion of Burma" (i.e., Buddhism) and converting Burmans to Islam.[138]

Unlike the Persian writer mentioned above, 'Abd al-Khaliq recognizes that the Burmese worship one God (Urdu. *khoda*) and follow one scripture (*kitab*). Applying the Islamic doctrine of prophethood to the presence of multiple Buddhas in Buddhism, he further regards their "God" as manifesting himself in various "incarnations" (Urdu. *pahya*), five main ones of which are Gugatagu (Pali. Kakusandha), Gunagun (Pali. Koṇāgamara), Gataba (Pali. Kassapa), Shingutama (Pali. Gotama), and A'yi Madi (Pali. Ariya Metteyya). He identifies the era of Shingutama as the ongoing one, to be followed by that of A'yi Madi,

134 Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 62.

135 Ibid., 114–5.

136 Ibid., 115.

137 Green, "Buddhism, Islam and the Religious Economy," 178–86.

138 Ibid., 186–9. It is to be noted that 'Abd al-Khaliq was not writing about Buddhism as such, but about the Burmans as a religious group. He did not seem to have had access to the latest Western scholarship on Buddhism and gleaned all his information on it from Burmese sources (ibid., 188, 190). That he was not familiar with the history of Buddhism is clear from his discussion of the historical Buddha: see below.

which would make the end of the world (Urdu. *qiyamat*, the Islamic term for resurrection).[139]

The author's attempt to find a parallel theological system in Buddhism, however, quickly turns into a more inclusivist vision as he continues to discuss such "incarnations" in Buddhism. This time he mentions a group of four: Sulamani (i.e., Solomon), Dajalla (i.e., Dajall, the false messiah or 'Antichrist'), Ma Daniga, and A'yi Madi (i.e., Mahdi), followed by a story he claims to have heard "from a respected wandering faqir" about a mountain in the northern frontier of Burma. Inside one of the caves on this remote mountain was installed a jeweled marble statue with an inscription above which reads: "No one will be saved until their every deed is in accordance with the command of Ma Daniga."[140] Adding that Ma Daniga is none other than Prophet Muhammad according to local Muslims, he declares that the Burmans have no chance of attaining salvation unless they follow the Prophet, that is, despite having a similarly structured list of "incarnations" of God. This is followed by another argument to the effect that Shingutama, whom the Burmans are following, is not a true messenger of God, given that he was born after Muhammad.[141]

The Indian Muslim author's missionary goal is particularly clear from his focus on the public debate he claims to have had with the Thathanabaing ("Keeper of the Sāsana," Pali: religion, i.e., Buddhism), the royally-installed primate of the Thudhamma monastic lineage, whom he believes to be the head of Burmese Buddhists, in Mandalay during 1889–90.[142] According to his own account, 'Abd al-Khaliq successfully refuted the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation (*tanasukh*), especially the way in which sin is rewarded with punishment, pointing out its illogical character. If a person is punished for a sin committed in a previous life after being born again in a new body, one would not understand for what one is being punished. Islam, on the other hand, is "logical and natural" as the same body that has committed the sin would be punished for it. After he has repeated his point, he manages to get the Thathanabaing to admit the illogicality of reincarnation and begin doubting its veracity. Triumphantly, the Muslim speaker further highlights the "morally

139 Ibid., 191–2.

140 Ibid., 192–3.

141 Ibid., 190, 193. This is obviously an error as the Buddha preceded Muhammad.

142 The historicity of this debate is not confirmed: ibid., 198–9. As mentioned earlier, the most immediate background for 'Abd al-Khaliq's aggressive missionary attitude is the newly emerged competition among religions following the destabilization of Buddhism in colonial Burma, rather than the local inter-religious contexts. Indeed, in Mandalay where he was active as a missionary, Buddhist-Muslim relations were harmonious: ibid., 198.

repugnant implications of Buddhist doctrine" by arguing that if there is rebirth, one could "innocently commit incest by marrying one's mother or daughter." In the end, the Thathanabaing concedes the superiority of Islam, acknowledging it as a "true religion."[143]

Although it is doubtful that the debate, if it took place at all, unfolded exactly in the way he describes it, 'Abd al-Khaliq's account makes clear what aspect of Buddhist teachings is particularly problematic for him—the doctrine of reincarnation. Despite believing in one God and having a line of their own "prophets," the message of their religion, at least in the form in which it has come down to them, is false, and the Buddhist Burmans are in need of being saved through embracing Islam.[144] Here, one sees clearly the *dīn al-fiṭrah* thinking in operation.

In China, the pressure of acculturation and the process of marginalization of Muslims led to Muslim writers presenting Islam as part of Chinese history, and the Islamic belief system as compatible with that of Confucianism. They produced a number of legends about the origin of Islam in China. One notable example is the story of the Chinese Emperor who, following his dream, dispatched an envoy to Mecca. His envoy was sent back by the Prophet with his uncle Sa'd Waqqās, bearing a Prophet's portrait for the Emperor.[145] Muslim scholars also argued for the common origin of Islam and Confucianism, emphasizing their shared focus on worship, whereby Heaven, the object of worship in Confucianism, was viewed as equivalent to God (Ch. *shang-ti*) in Islam.[146]

Similarly in developing their interpretation of Islam vis-à-vis the predominant tradition of China, consisting of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism,[147] Chinese Muslims from this period were socially and politically motivated to relate Islam to Neo-Confucianism in particular, which was itself built on a synthesis with elements of the three traditions. Yet such apologetics sometimes accompanied a dismissal of Buddhism and Daoism as inferior to

143 Ibid., 200–201.

144 The author's missionary concern is also expressed through his description of local customs where he highlights their alienness/otherness, indicating the need he feels to civilize them: ibid., 194.

145 Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 24–5; Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 160f; Marshall Broomhall, *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1910), 65–9.

146 Israeli, "Islamization and Sinicization," 162–3.

147 For example, the so-called five pillars of Islam are explained by Liu Zhi (c. 1670–1724), the most prolific Chinese Muslim theologian, using major teachings of all three traditions to make them recognizable and admirable in wider Chinese contexts. Petersen, *Interpreting Islam in China*, 102–3.

Confucianism and Islam, thereby courting favor with the Confucian Chinese authorities.[148] Most notably, however, Chinese Muslim writers frequently employed Buddhist expressions to describe Islamic teachings. This suggests that their use of Buddhist terminology was motivated by a pragmatic approach, namely, to render Islamic concepts accessible to Chinese readers, rather than for the purpose of showing specific sympathy for Buddhism or its relevance to Islam for socio-political reasons.[149] For example, Wang Daiyu (1590–1658), the first major Chinese Muslim author of *han kitab*, repeatedly criticized the Buddhist concept of emptiness for failing to recognize the Real (Ch. *zhen*) as the ultimate principle of creation, while regarding the Neo-Confucian worldview as compatible with that of Islam.[150] However, he rendered the two fundamental Islamic cosmological terms, namely *'ālam al-shahādah* ("the world of the witnessed," i.e., the perceptible world) and *'ālam al-ghayb* ("the world of the absent," i.e., the imperceptible world) as the "world of color" (Ch. *yusejie*) and the "colorless world" (Ch. *wusejie*) respectively, which are key notions of Mahāyāna Buddhism usually translated into English as "the world of forms" and "the formless world."[151] Ma Dexin (1794–1874), whose work marked the maturation of the *han kitab* literature in the nineteenth century, also employs a range of Buddhist terms to describe Islamic concept: such as *zhizun* ("most revered and respected"), one of the commonly used epithets for the Buddha, to describe the highest Lord; and *renru* (Skt. *kṣānti*, one of the *pāramitā*s, or perfections, of the *bodhisattva*) for the paramount Islamic virtue *ṣabr* (patience).[152] He also renders the taking of the oath of a pilgrimage ceremony as *shoujie*, a Buddhist term for receiving precepts.[153] Despite the general inclination of these authors to align Islamic teachings more with Confucianism than with Buddhism, their choice of Buddhist terms, especially those related to practice, to describe Islamic teachings constitute intriguing cases of proto-parallelism, where some degree of recognition of comparability is clearly at work at a fundamental semantic level.

148 Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, 137; Benite, *The Dao of* Muhammad, 101, 104.

149 This bears much resemblance to the wartime Japanese attitudes of employing Shinto concepts and Buddhist terminology in discussing Islam (see Chapter 5).

150 Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2000), 50–51, 72, 79, 109.

151 Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, 19, 22, 163. A similar criticism of Buddhism is also found in the work of Liu Zhi. Ibid., 123, 187, 189. In the Mahāyāna worldview, as epitomized in the *Heart Sutra*, form is identified with formlessness, i.e., emptiness.

152 Petersen, *Interpreting Islam in China*, 144–5 and 147 respectively.

153 Ibid., 110. For Wang Daiyu's choice of Chinese terms for the five pillars of Islam, see ibid., 97.

3.3 *Modern Buddhist Writings*

The Buddhist literature on Islam from the modern period mainly consists of Tibetan and Chinese writings.[154] They tend to perpetuate earlier negative attitudes toward Muslims. While knowledge of Islam continued to improve among the Chinese, they were still prejudiced against Muslims on a social level. Similarly in Tibet, long-standing negative depictions of Muslims as a threat to Buddhism persisted among Tibetan scholars. However, Tibet also saw the development of an interesting piece of popular literature, in which Islamic ideas were expressed using major Buddhist concepts, such as the Dharma, *karma*, and the Jewel (as in the Three Jewels).

While some confusion persisted over major concepts and places such as Mecca and Medina, Chinese knowledge of Islam expanded further in the modern period. For example, Prophet Muhammad was called a Buddha much less frequently and his relation to the *huihui* people in China was clearly recognized. Mosques became known as *li-pai-ssu* (prayer temples) rather than "Buddha towers" or "pagodas."[155] Chinese writers also acknowledged that Muslims have no other object of veneration but "Heaven."[156]

While the improved Chinese understanding of Islam is undoubtedly correlated to the steady Muslim presence in China, it did not trigger a positive appreciation of Islam, but rather contributed to continued discrimination against Muslims.[157] Similarly, the decreasing use of Buddhist terms for Islamic concepts, which was clearly facilitated by increased information and familiarity with the Muslim presence, happened to index a stronger sense of difference. It allowed for the process of othering of Muslims as a more clearly demarcated

154 In South Asia, major Buddhist references to Islam tended to revolve around the Muslim "invasion" of India and the "destruction" of major Buddhist monasteries such as Nalanda and Vikramasila. They often cited colonial scholarship, which, as mentioned above, exaggerated the extent of damage inflicted on such Buddhist institutions. Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), a leading figure in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and Buddhist revivalism, vilified Muslims, whom he regarded as solely responsible for the demise of Buddhism in India, calling them "fanatic" and "blood-thirsty." Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed. Ananda Guruge (Colombo: Anagarika Dharmapala Birth Centenary Committee, Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Ceylon, 1965), see, e.g., 587 and 635.

155 Although some sources use the Persian word for 'messenger' instead of the term Buddha to refer to the Prophet, there is no clear indication that the concept was understood properly. See Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, 111–2.

156 Ibid., 113.

157 Kataoka, "Mochitsuzukerareru henken," 116–8. Negative views of Muslims unfortunately persist today: see, for example, Chō, *Kaikyō*, 187f.

alien group within wider Chinese society, rather than an increased recognition of the Islamic tradition through understanding it more on its own terms. In other words, the disappearance of proto-parallelism may have gone hand in hand with a starker discourse of othering and may have even encouraged it.

In parallel, some Tibetan Buddhists from the modern period continued to see Muslims primarily as a threat to Buddhism,[158] occasionally elaborating how Islam came to antagonize Buddhism. For example, Taranatha (1575–1634) relates that the founder of Islam, originally called Kumārasena, was versed in Buddhist scriptures yet had no faith in the Dharma. He was consequently expelled from the Sangha (community of ordained individuals), which motivated him to "found a religion as rival of the law of the Buddha."[159] This figure then, under the name "Mama-thar," is described to have "changed his robes, composed the *mleccha* scripture preaching violence and kept it concealed in the place of Bi-sli-mi-lil, the great demon among the *asura*s."[160]

While the image of Islam as the ultimate rival of Buddhism persisted, there also developed in the modern period a work indicative of cross-fertilization between Buddhists and Muslims. The Tibetan-speaking world produced *Kha-che pha lu'i blab bya* (Khache Phalu's Advice on Life), a short piece attributed to a Tibetan Muslim called Faizullah (around eighteenth century). This book of aphorisms contains extracts from Persian works, which were then adapted for a Tibetan Buddhist audience by using major Buddhist terms such as the Dharma (Tib. *chos*) and *karma* (Tib. *las rgyu bras*, cause and effect).[161] In the section on religion, the Islamic concept of one God (Tib. *go rdar*) is rendered as "the Jewel" or "precious One" (Tib. *dkon mchog*), utilizing the term found in the important Buddhist phrase "the Three Jewels" (Tib. *dkon mchog gsum*).[162]

158 For example, see B. C. Sarkār, "Some Tibetan References to Muslim Advance into Bihar and Bengal to the State of Buddhism Thereafter," *Indian Historical Records Commission: Proceedings of Meetings* 18 (1942), 138–52.

159 To facilitate recognition, the present study uses the commonly used spelling Sangha rather than the faithful transliteration (Skt. *saṃgha*, Pali. *saṅgha*).

160 Taranatha, *History of Buddhism in India*, trans. Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Delhi: Motilal Banasidass Publishers, 1970), 117–8. "Bi-sli-mi-lil" here seems to derive from *bismillah* and refer to God. *Asura*s are demigods, or 'anti-gods,' in Buddhist cosmology, who have a jealous power-seeking character. Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 74; Ian Harris, "Attitudes to Nature," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 241. This is yet another example of a Buddhist term employed for an Islamic notion, in which the negative aspect of the term is emphasized.

161 Tashi Tsering, "The Advice of the Tibetan Muslim 'Phalu': A Preliminary Discussion of a Popular Buddhist / Islamic Literary Treatise," *Tibetan Review* (February 1988), 10–15, see 12; (March 1988), 18–21.

162 Dawa Norbu, trans., *Kache Phalu's Advice on the Art of Living* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1986), 2.

While there is no knowing if this piece was created with a particular social or political agenda, it is fairly clear that these Buddhist terms were used to render Islamic teachings accessible to a popular Tibetan Buddhist readership, making the work a significant example of proto-parallelism.

CHAPTER 3

The Challenge of Pluralism and the Chance of Parallelism within Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue in Southeast Asia

The contemporary period (1947–) has witnessed Buddhists and Muslims scattered over ever more extensive regions of the globe, with the socio-political contexts within which their relations are enveloped becoming extremely diversified. The end of colonialism and the creation of new nation-states have brought fresh opportunities as well as challenges to Buddhist-Muslim relations. Under continuing Western hegemony, the twenty-first century has opened with the Taliban's destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan and the 9/11 attacks, which have given rise to a significant global surge in Islamophobia.[1] Such events have been followed by the rise of religious nationalism in various South and Southeast Asian countries from around 2010, unsettling the inter-religious equilibrium in these regions. These developments have had a particularly strong impact on Buddhist-Muslim relations in Southeast Asia, now the biggest stage of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in the world, where recent waves of communal tension between Buddhists and Muslims have been threatening the ethos of peaceful symbiosis that has long characterized the region. They have at the same time led to new initiatives for Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, in which parallelist approaches have been increasingly employed within Southeast Asia and beyond.[2]

The present chapter explores the unfolding of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Southeast Asia, focusing on Thailand and Malaysia, two foremost instantiations of Buddhist-Muslim engagement in

1 Although opinions were divided among the Taliban members, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas seems to have been politically motivated and theologically argued for. Kieko Obuse, "What does Bamiyan Tell Us about Muslim Attitudes to Buddhism? Unpacking 'Buddhist-Muslim Conflicts' in Contemporary Asia," *Religions of South Asia* 8: 3 (2014), 301–19.

2 The importance of Southeast Asia as a major stage of Buddhist-Muslim engagements has been acknowledged globally, with the launch of major international series of Buddhist-Muslim dialogues including sessions held in Southeast Asia. See, e.g., the series of dialogues initiated by Dharma Master Hsin Tao, the founder of the Museum of World Religions in Taiwan. Bhikkuni Liao Yi and Maria R. Habito, eds., *Listening: Buddhist-Muslim Dialogues 2002–04* (Taipei: Museum of World Religions, 2005). This series was initiated after the Bamiyan incident to foster better mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims: ibid., 406.

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a Buddhist-majority and a Muslim-majority society in the region, respectively. It discusses how the socio-political contestations involving Buddhists and Muslims in both societies derive from local, regional, and global factors, including the persistent recourse to the narrative of Muslim destruction of Buddhism India, which serves as a basis of Buddhist distrust of Muslims in Thailand. The chapter demonstrates that the majority-minority dynamics and state policies partly explain the differences between the situations in the two countries, especially with regard to the ways in which Buddhist-Muslim dialogues have developed. In particular, it will highlight state intervention as a major factor in the relative success that Malaysia has seen in this field, where the increasing use of a parallelist format may also help keep dialogue acceptable to conservative Muslims, hence sustainable in a long run.

1 Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Thailand and Malaysia

Thailand is a predominantly Theravāda Buddhist country,[3] where Buddhism has a special status as virtually a paramount symbol of the nation, although it is not its designated state religion. While required to be a Buddhist, the Thai monarch is defined by the national constitution to be the patron of all religions, thus allowing non-Buddhists free practice of their traditions. For example, the annual Islamic celebration of *mawlid al-nabī* (the birthday of Prophet Muhammad) is attended by the monarch who officially opens the event.[4] Muslims in Thailand make up over 5% of the population, constituting the largest minority religious group in the country.[5] They are ethnically diverse and can be distinguished depending on whether they are primarily Thai-speaking

3 Thanks to the significant ethnic Chinese presence within its borders, however, 'Thai Buddhism' has also come to display Chinese/Mahāyāna elements, such as the veneration of Amitābha and Baiṣajyaguru (i.e., the medicine Buddha).

4 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Celebrating Muhammad's Birthday in Buddha's Land: Managing Religious Relations through Religious Festival," in *Religion, Public Policy and Social Transformation in Southeast Asia (2013–2016)*, vol. 2, *Religion, Gender and Identity*, ed. Dicky Sofjan (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), 146, 151–2. This does mean, however, that Muslims as a minority group do not experience any inconvenience as they seek to practice Islam in everyday situations living among the Buddhist majority: see, e.g., Hidetake Yano, "Fukashika sareru tai no musurimu: isurāmu hyōshō kara mita taibukkyō to kōkyō shūkyō," in *Ajia no kōkyō shūkyō: posto shakaishugi kokka no seikyō kankei*, ed. Yoshihide Sakurai (Sapporo: Hokkaidō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2021), 193–232.

5 Some statistics indicate that the number is much higher, at 12%. See Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, *Islam in Modern Thailand: Faith, Philanthropy and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013), 222.

or Malay-speaking. Muslims residing in the central plain are mostly Thai-speaking and tend to identify themselves as Thai Muslims regardless of their ethnic background, that is, whether they are Cham, Iranian or Malay. Thai-speaking Muslims are also found in Chinese Muslim communities in the north as well as among the ethnically Malay Muslims residing in the few southern provinces. The majority of Malay-speaking Muslims, who often also speak Thai, on the other hand, are concentrated in the three provinces of the 'deep South,' where they form a majority of 85%.[6] Since around the 1970s, a separatist movement among Muslims in the south has given rise to serious political tension, resulting in a series of violent clashes between some Muslim insurgents and the Thai military.[7] The so-called 'southern conflict' was originally a political struggle for autonomy among ethnic Malay Muslims residing in those provinces, which were incorporated into what is now Thailand as the result of the territorial agreement made between the kingdom of Siam and British Malaya in 1909. The situation was exacerbated through aggressive assimilationist policies adopted by the Thai state during the mid-twentieth century and continued to be volatile through the later part of the century, as the insurgencies of groups of Malay Muslims created a sense of fear among Buddhists. In the post-9/11 context of heightened global Islamophobia, moreover, the range of major incidents of violence in the south during and after 2004 have pitted Muslims in the region further against the Thai (Buddhist) authorities, feeding the rising anti-Muslim sentiments in the country.[8]

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6 Scupin and Joll, "Buddhist-Muslim Dynamics," 103–4, 115–7; Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Ethnoreligious and Political Dimensions of the Southern Thailand Conflict," in *Islam and Politics: Renewals and Resistance in the Muslim World*, eds. Amit Pandya and Ellen Laipson (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2009), 44; Raymond Scupin, "Muslim Accommodation in Thai Society," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9: 2 (1998), 229–58. This renders a clear ethno-religious distinction, like the one seen in Malaysia where Muslims are mostly Malays, less tenable in Thailand, being only applicable to the south.

7 On this complex situation, see, e.g., Jitpiromsri Srisompob and Sobhonvasu Panyasak, "Unpacking Thailand's Southern Conflict: The Poverty of Structural Explanations," *Critical Asian Studies* 38: 1 (2006), 95–117.

8 Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Understanding Islamophobia in Southeast Asia," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*, eds. Irene Zempi and Imran Awan (London: Routledge, 2019), 286–97; Duncan McCargo, "Thai Buddhism, Thai Buddhists and the Southern Conflict," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40 (2009), 8. Note that continuing tension in the southern-most provinces has led to the militarization of Buddhist monasteries, including the presence of "military monks": see Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury*, esp. Ch. 4. Buddhist distrust of Muslims also manifests itself via the use of a "pork test" among Buddhist Thais to find out if a stranger is Muslim or not. Ibid., 92–3. This confirms the continuation of the use of pork-eating as a boundary (or identity) marker historically observed between Christians and Muslims. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 241–2.

At a grassroots level, however, contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations in Thailand have not necessarily been confrontational, although peaceful coexistence or even mutual integration rarely seem to inform the general discourses developed on a national level. For example, in some villages in the south, intermarriage and conversion (in both directions) between Buddhism and Islam have been regular occurrences.[9] In addition to attending each other's holidays and funerals, Buddhists and Muslims have also shared certain practices. Notable examples include Muslim participation in the Buddhist practice of temporary ordination[10] and the development of a ritual based on ancestor spirit worship where both Buddhist monks and Muslim imams participate.[11] The idea of merit-making (Thai: *tham bun*, performing of meritorious acts in the hope of a better future, i.e., by enhancing one's karmic standing), which constitutes a major part of Thai Theravāda Buddhist practice, is also commonly adopted, and adapted, by Muslims in the southern provinces.[12]

The recent rise of Buddhist nationalism in Thailand has largely taken the form of a call by Sangha members and lay Buddhist intellectuals for the protection of Buddhism against the perceived threat of Islam.[13] Some have also

9 It should also be noted that the levels of communal tension and the modes of engagement differ significantly from one province to another in the south. Ryoko Nishii, "A Corpse Necessitates Disentangled Relationships: Boundary Transgression and Boundary-Making in a Buddhist-Muslim Village in Southern Thailand," in *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, eds. Iselin Frydenlund and Micheal Jerryson (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 170. While the escalation of political conflict has negatively affected Buddhist-Muslim relations in some provinces, in other provinces the increasing influence of *da'wah* (meaning call or invitation to Islam, i.e., missionary) movements on Muslims has led to a decreased level of contact. Nishii, "A Corpse Necessitates Disentangled Relationships," 174–5.

10 Nishii, *Shi o meguru jissen shūkyō*, esp. Ch. 3.

11 Alexander Horstmann, "Living Together: The Transformation of Multi-Religious Coexistence in Southern Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42: 3 (2011), 494.

12 Angela Burr, "Religious Institutional Diversity – Social Structural and Conceptual Unity: Islam and Buddhism in a Southern Thai Coastal Fishing Village," *Journal of the Siam Society* 60: 6 (1972), 183–216, see esp. 204–6. The concept is employed for a wide range of Islamic practices, such as the reading and reciting of the Qur'an, daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, pilgrimages, various acts of charity through monetary and material gifts, and the hosting of communal feasts. For the Muslim adaptation of this concept, see Christopher M. Joll, *Muslim Merit-Making in Thailand's Far-South* (Dordrecht and New York: Springer, 2012).

13 It is to be noted that the Thai Buddhist call for the protection of Buddhism against a non-Buddhist religion or ideology has a longer history, wherein both Christianity and communism have been identified as the major sources of threat, before Islam. See, e.g., Katewadee Kulabkaew, "The Rise of Thailand's Buddhism Protection Movement," *ISEAS Perspective* 29 (2019). Although internal factors (such as monastics not adhering to the Vinaya rules) have also been pointed out for the perceived weakening of Buddhism in

undertaken active campaigns to make Buddhism a state religion, which have thus far been unsuccessful.[14] In such discourses, diverse factors echoing global discourses on Islam (like those reflecting Islamophobia), in combination with domestic developments, contribute to the suspicion toward the putative threat originating from Muslims. For example, concerns for the transnational development of so-called radical movements among Muslims, whose manifestation are the insurgencies (mainly against the Thai authorities but sometimes targeting local Buddhists too) in the south, may be mentioned alongside the perceived rapid expansion of the Muslim population, especially through intermarriage and proselytization within South and Southeast Asia, and the putative favoritism for Islam displayed by the Thai government through the approval of policies supporting Islamic practice, such as the *ḥalāl* certification system.[15] In particular, the granting of more religious rights to non-Buddhists, especially Muslims, has been perceived as a form of 'injustice' to Buddhism and as threatening the superior position some Buddhists believe it should assume within the national administration of religions.[16]

The wave of Buddhist nationalism against the perceived threat of Islam in Thailand, which originated primarily from domestic socio-political

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the country, the Sangha has insisted on external threat as its primary cause. For the factors contributing to the current campaign for the protection of Buddhism, see Katewadee Kulabkaew, "Framing Religious Injustice: Thai Sangha's Discourse on Buddhism Protection in the 21st Century," *Rian Thai: International Journal of Thai Studies* 5 (2012), 43–64. For the historical development of Buddhist apologetics against Christianity in Thailand, see Thongchai Winichakul, "Buddhist Apologetics and a Genealogy of Comparative Religion in Siam," *NUMEN* 62 (2015), 76–99.

14 Arnaud Dubus, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand* (Bangkok: IRASEC, 2017), 79–82. Some lay Buddhist intellectuals have made this the main objective in their political activities, as seen in the example of the Pandin Dharma (Land of Dharma) Party: see Panu Wongchaum, "'Buddhism under Threat': Thai Election Gives Platform to Radicals," Reuters (7 March 2019) https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-election-buddhism-idUSKCN1QO0E1 [accessed 16 February 2022]; Scupin and Joll, "Buddhist-Muslim Dynamics," 128–9.

15 Natcha Lim, "Consumerism and Proselytism Threatening Buddhism in Asia," *Lotus News* (5 March 2019) http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2019/03/05/consumerism-and-proselytism-threatening-buddhism-in-asia [accessed 20 June 2021]; my interview with a senior Thai scholar of Religious Studies and Buddhism, Mahidol University, 1 March 2019. P. A. Payutto, a highly regarded scholar-monk, has also written a work titled *Phay haeng phra phutthasaasanaa nai pratheet thai* (Dangers for Buddhism in Thailand) (Bangkok: Mulnithi Phutthatham, 2002), in which he describes Christians and Muslims as aggressive and encouraging religious intolerance. McCargo, "Thai Buddhism, Thai Buddhists and the Southern Conflict," 8; Scupin and Joll, "Buddhist-Muslim Dynamics," 126. The work, however, discusses both external and internal dangers and does not focus on the threat of Islam.

16 Katewadee, "The Rise of Thailand's Buddhism Protection Movement," 4–6.

developments, has also come to assume a transnational character. In 2016, major Buddhist organizations in Thailand, in collaboration with Wat Phra Dhammakaya, an influential Thai Buddhist organization with a large lay following, and Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, one of the two state-run Buddhist universities in Thailand, jointly awarded a "leadership award" to Ma Ba Tha, a Burmese Buddhist organization with an ethno-nationalistic agenda, for being "an outstanding peace organization."[17] The prize-awarding ceremony was attended by Ashin Wirathu, the leader of Ma Ba Tha (as well as of the 969 movement in Myanmar), who is known for his anti-Islamic stance.[18] The involvement of the major Thai Buddhist organizations in the recognition of Ma Ba Tha, an ethno-nationalist Buddhist organization, suggests that not a small segment of Thai Buddhism supports such anti-Muslim campaigns.[19] The development of such transnational/regional connections is also reflected in the frequency with which international conferences on such themes as threats to or crisis of Buddhism have been organized in Thailand during the past decade.[20]

What is notable in the unfolding of the increasing call for the protection of Buddhism in Thailand is the role of the conventional narrative of the demise

17 See, e.g., Aung Kyaw Min, "Ma Ba Tha Receives Leadership Award in Thailand," *Myanmar Times* (26 February 2016) https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/19228-ma-ba-tha-receives-leadership-award-in-thailand.html [accessed 29 August 2019]. This award to "peace organisation Ma Ba Tha" was organized by the World Buddhist Leaders Organisation in collaboration with Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University. See Sanitsuda Ekachai, "Dangerous Path towards Religious Extremism" (23 March 2016) https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/907264/dangerous-path-toward-religious-extremism [accessed 9 August 2022].

18 The 969 movement has also established collaboration with Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a Sri Lankan Buddhist organization similarly known for its anti-Muslim stance, pointing to the increasingly transnational nature of these forms of Buddhist nationalism. Iselin Frydenlund, "The Rise of Buddhist-Muslim Conflict in Asia and Possibilities for Transformation," NOREF (*Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*) *Policy Brief* (December 2015), 2.

19 For example, high-profile Thai Buddhists have been reported to support Ma Ba Tha's activities, financially assisting the group's project to launch a radio station. Lawi Weng, "Ma Ba Tha to Trade Bullhorns for Broadcast Towers in Radio Deal," *The Irawaddy* (23 June 2015) https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/ma-ba-tha-to-trade-bullhorns-for-broadcast-towers-in-radio-deal.html [accessed 15 February 2022]; Dubus, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, 76–7.

20 See, e.g., Lim, "Consumerism and Proselytism Threatening Buddhism in Asia." The aforementioned conference where Ashin Wirathu was awarded the prize also featured a panel on the "crisis in the Buddhist world": Aung Kyaw Min, "Ma Ba Tha Receives Leadership Award in Thailand."

of Buddhism in India (discussed in the previous chapter) in reinforcing the idea of the Muslim threat.[21] The common view that Muslims destroyed Buddhism in India constitutes an unfortunate *basso continuo* through a sense of grudge and wariness toward Muslims among Thai Buddhists, especially members of the Sangha.[22] The perception of the spread of Islam as overwhelming Buddhism has served as an extra motive for the Thai Sangha to step up its effort of missionary activities abroad. For example, the abovementioned Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University runs a program called "Overseas Going Missionary Monks Training Program" through its Dhammaduta College.[23] The official objective of the program is to propagate Buddhism abroad to those who do not have a Buddhist background.[24] When I asked the vice director of the Dhammaduta College about the objective of the program, he simply stated: "[We] want to increase the Buddhist population outside Thailand. There are only 700 million [Buddhists in the world] now, so it is better to increase them." He then added that the conversion of non-Buddhist foreigners will be done "not by violence but by peace [sic.],"[25] an expression arguably triggered by the wrongly perceived propensity toward aggressive proselytization among Muslims.

The impact of this globally reproduced narrative is much more far-reaching, however, in that it also informs the ways in which Thai Buddhists imagine the future of their religious community and seek to make interventions for its preservation. In a speech addressed to the participants of the Dhammaduta program, the former rector of Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University is

21 For the persistence of this narrative, see Johan Elverskog, "Foreword," to *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, eds. Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), viii–x.

22 Katewadee, "The Rise of Thailand's Buddhism Protection Movement," 6. It is also my experience of interacting with students at Mahidol University as well as Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University that monastics, especially those from Thailand and Sri Lanka, tend to be highly vocal about what they perceive as a continuation of the aggressive expansion of Islam, symbolized by the narrative of the demise of Buddhism in India.

23 The Pali term *dhammaduta* means the ambassador or messenger of Dhamma, i.e., Buddhist teachings. It is a generic term that refers to monastics traveling for the purpose of Dhamma propagation.

24 The website of Dhammaduta College lists three objectives for the training program. In a slightly paraphrased format, they are: 1) to equip Dhammaduta monks with the necessary knowledge and capability, good conduct, and confidence to carry out religious activities abroad; 2) to produce Dhammaduta monks who are suitably qualified to be sent abroad, and 3) to fulfill the Thai Sangha's task to propagate Buddhism abroad. Dhammaduta College, "Background of Dhammaduta College" http://www.odc.mcu.ac.th/?page_id=712&lang=en [accessed 21 August 2022].

25 My interview with Ven. Vinaithonsamut Thavaradhammo, 14 August 2018.

reported to have compared Thailand to Nalanda. He sees Thailand, with his university and the training program, as the world's center of Buddhist studies, just like Nalanda was during the sixth and seventh centuries, when many students came from abroad to study there. Highlighting the importance of the training program, he said: "[Nalanda] was subsequently destroyed, but those from abroad were able to maintain Buddhism [in their home countries]. If the same thing happens in Thailand, there will be Buddhism left in the West."[26] The focus on the mission to the West suggests a clear awareness of the possibility that Buddhism might experience a drastic decline in Thailand, and in Southeast Asia, in the future. This shows that a new sense of urgency has emerged among Thai Buddhists (particularly monastics) in the face of the perceived expansion of Islam in the religion, making them renew their commitment to ensuring the survival of Buddhism.[27]

Over in Malaysia, on the other hand, Buddhist-Muslim relations are strongly influenced by the political dominance of Muslims, which was instituted at the time of the country's independence from Britain in 1957 as the Federation of Malaya. Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, even though only about 60% of its population is Muslim. The inter-religious relations in Malaysia are affected by strong ethnic boundaries, where the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims (including Buddhists) takes the form of a stark ethnic divide between Malays and non-Malays. The followers of Buddhism constitute around 20% of the country's population, thereby forming the strongest minority. Although over 80% of Malaysian Buddhists are of Chinese background,[28] there are also other ethnic communities, such as Thai, Burmese, and Sinhalese,

26 My interview with Ven. Seng Hurng, 7 August, 2019.

27 The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, on the other hand, does not seem to be as much a source of grudge against Muslims among Thai Buddhists. This may be because the incident did not affect the overall prosperity of Buddhism directly, as the putative destruction of the major monasteries in India in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is considered to have done. Alternatively, the Bamiyan incident may be regarded as a sheer confirmation of the continuing threat of Islam to Buddhism, of which the Indian narrative is regarded as the primary symbol.

28 Most Chinese Malaysians follow the Chinese form of Buddhism and Chinese popular religion, the latter of which is increasingly identified and organized as Daoism, in order partly to gain greater political representation within the Muslim majority context of Malaysia. Tan Chee-Beng, *Chinese Religion in Malaysia: Temples and Communities* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 4, 112, 123. Although there are many Muslim minority groups present in China, these groups are not represented within the Chinese Malaysian population, most of whom belong to the Han ethnic group. Therefore, the vast majority of Malaysian Chinese Muslims are converts. Cheng Yamin, *A Chinese Life of Islam: The Search for Identity* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2012), 2–3.

making Malaysia's Buddhist community a highly diverse mix representing both Theravāda and Mahāyāna strands of Buddhism.[29]

Based on the policies set out in Rukunegara (national principles), the Malaysian Constitution grants non-Muslims the right to practice their religions provided they do not proselytize Muslims. However, the government-led Islamization policies that have been conducted since the 1970s have increasingly affected non-Muslims' right to exercise religious freedom.[30] In particular, issues such as forced demolition or relocation of existing places of worship and difficulty in obtaining permission to build new ones, and the difficulty faced by converts to Islam and their families in acquiring rights (for example, to reconvert or conduct non-Islamic mortuary rites for individuals whose conversion was not known or accepted by them), have created much anxiety among them.[31]

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29 Samuels, "Contemporary Buddhism in Malaysia"; Tan Lee Ooi, "The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Malaysia," in *Religious Diversity in Muslim-Majority States in Southeast Asia: Areas of Toleration and Conflict*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 321–2. Tan Chee-Beng, "The Religions of the Chinese in Malaysia," in *The Chinese in Malaysia*, eds. Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 282–3, 301, 309–10. As a religious minority, different Buddhist communities in Malaysia tend to work across sectarian lines, uniting for socio-political reasons as well as drawing on each other's traditions. The most salient example of the latter is Theravāda Buddhists' incorporation of major Mahāyāna *bodhisattva*s, such as Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), widely venerated among the Chinese. Kō Un, "Supirichuaritī no sinmitsuken kara kōkyōsei e – isurāmu sekai marēshia no 'bukkyō kōkyōken,'" in *Ōkan suru shinmitsusei to kōkyōsei: tōnan ajia no shūkyō shakai soshiki ni miru aidentitī to seizon*, ed. Kō Un (Kyoto: Kyoto Daigaku Gakujutsu Shuppankai, 2014), 176. Also see Samuels, "Contemporary Buddhism in Malaysia." Similar appropriations are also seen in Thailand, where Chinese culture has a long-standing presence. For the increasing level of convergence between Theravāda and (Chinese) Mahāyāna traditions in Malaysia, see Judith Nagata, "Limits to the Indigenisation of Buddhism in Malaysia, with a Focus on the Religious Community in Penang," in *Dimensions of Tradition and Development in Malaysia*, eds. Rokiah Talib and Tan Chee-Beng (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pedanduk Publications, 1995), 319–22, 343.

30 The state authority has also become less accommodating toward the forms of Islam other than the state-sanctioned 'orthodoxy,' such as Shi'a Islam, which was outlawed in 1996: see Norshahril Saat, "'Deviant' Muslims: The Plight of Shias in Contemporary Malaysia," in *Religious Diversity in Muslim-Majority States in Southeast Asia: Areas of Toleration and Conflict*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 359–78.

31 This has led non-Muslim organizations to champion inter-religious dialogue since the early 1980s to safeguard their rights, which is why the participation of Islamic organizations in inter-religious dialogue has been relatively limited. Wan Sabri Wan Yusof and Arfah Ab Majid, "Inter-Religious Dialogue in Malaysia: Past Experience, Present Scenario and Future Challenges," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 3: 2 (2013), 47.

While Muslims in Thailand, as the first minority, are regarded with particular suspicion, non-Muslim minorities in Malaysia, including Buddhists, are in a comparably vulnerable position vis-à-vis the Muslim majority.[32] Non-Muslim groups have been increasingly politicized in their campaign against what they see as the infringement of their constitutional rights to practice their religion. Although Malaysian Buddhists have generally tended to take a non-confrontational attitude in voicing their discontent,[33] the increasing promotion of Islamization policies in the country has led to increasingly vocal political activism among some Buddhists since the early 2000s, notably via the activities of Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM) in the Puzhau Buddhist Vihara controversy.[34] Buddhists have also sought to express their concerns through the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), the main umbrella organization for non-Muslim groups established in 1983.[35] However, they have so far had only a symbolic representation. As they are less institutionally organized than

32 There is thus a general sense of unity among them. They tend to perceive major incidents or developments involving any one of them as having serious implications for non-Muslims in general. This is seen clearly in the Moorthy case in 2005, which heightened the sense of alarm and anxiety among non-Muslims. Chong Eu Choong, "The Christian Response to State-led Islamization in Malaysia," in *Religious Diversity in Muslim-majority States in Southeast Asia*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 311. On the Moorthy case and how it encouraged Indian Malaysians to be more politically organized, see Arunajeet Kaur, "Hindraf as a Response to Islamization in Malaysia," in *Religious Diversity in Muslim-Majority States in Southeast Asia*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 341–58. The prohibition of the use of specific Malay words by non-Muslims, although it mainly affects Christians, has also had a considerable impact on non-Christians. For example, during the so-called "Allah controversy," which unfolded in 2009–10, some Christian churches and a Sikh temple, among others, were attacked following the court verdict that deemed the banning unconstitutional, making non-Christians fear potential destruction of their places of worship. Camilleri, "Religious Pluralism in Malaysia," 232; Johan Saravanamuttu, "Introduction," to *Religious Diversity in Muslim-majority States in Southeast Asia*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 245.

33 One example of a successful outcome of such a non-confrontational approach is the Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA)'s attempt in 1962 to make Wesak Day, a Buddhist holiday commemorating the birth, the enlightenment, and the passing of the Buddha Gotama, a national holiday in Malaysia. Tan, "The Politics of Buddhist Organizations," 322–3.

34 For the case of Puzhao Buddhist Vihara, see Tan, "The Politics of Buddhist Organizations," 328–31; Nagata, "Limits to the Indigenisation," 329, 342.

35 Daoism was added in 2006. Their common goal is to limit the intrusion of the government into non-Islamic religious affairs. Chong, "The Christian Response," 299.

Muslims and there is no platform through which non-Muslims can negotiate with Muslims, their voice has not been heard.[36]

The rather strained majority-minority relations described above, however, are not the whole picture of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Malaysia, where the traditional ethos of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism that thrived in the wider region of Muslim Southeast Asia still survives.[37] Muslim dominance in the country does not always lead to the marginalization of Buddhists or the blanket rejection of Buddhist statues as a manifestation of 'idolatry.'[38] For example, in the dominantly Muslim state of Kelantan, Buddhism is actively practiced by ethnic Thai and Chinese populations, under Muslim patronage. Kelantan is also home to the largest Buddha statue in Malaysia, preserved

36 Tan, "The Religions of the Chinese," 310. To rectify this limitation, the idea of forming an Inter-faith Commission was proposed by the Malaysian Bar Council in 2005, but it never came to fruition due to the pressures from some Muslim and Malay NGOs, such as the Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN), an umbrella organization for Islamic NGOs in Malaysia. Najiah Athirah Jamaludin and Haslina Ibrahim, "The Muslims' Response to the Challenges of Religious Pluralism in Malaysia," *AL-ITQĀN* 3: 1 (2019), 64; Yeoh Seng Guan, "Actually Existing Religious Pluralism in Kuala Lumpur," *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 179 (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2012), 12; Gerhard Hoffstaedter, "Religious Pluralism in Malaysia: Can There Be Dialogue?" in *Culture, Religion and Conflict in Muslim Southeast Asia: Negotiating Tense Pluralisms*, eds. Joseph Camilleri and Sven Schottmann (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 47. The Special Committee to Promote Inter-Religious Understanding and Harmony, established by the government in 2010, has also been subject to numerous objections. One of them was directed against the use of the word "inter-religious," as the result of which it was renamed the Committee for Understanding and Harmony Among Religious Adherents. Yusof and Ab Majid, "Inter-Religious Dialogue in Malaysia," 50; Yeap Su Yin, "Malaysia's Interfaith Committee: Time to Start Dialogue," *RSIS Commentaries* 49/2011 (2011), 1–2.

37 Saravanamuttu, "Introduction," 239. Note also that the syncretic forms of Islam which do not conform to the state-defined orthodoxy continue to be practiced. See Gerhard Hoffstaedter, "Islamic Praxis and Theory: Negotiating Orthodoxy in Contemporary Malaysia," *Religious Diversity in Muslim-Majority States in Southeast Asia*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 253–67. For multiculturalism in Muslim Southeast Asia in its contemporary manifestations, see Khairudin Aljunied, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism: Southeast Asian Islam in Comparative Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

38 The Malaysian government views all non-Muslim traditions as involving forms of polytheism and idolatry, thus discouraging Muslims from attending non-Muslim religious rituals in the assumption that exposure to non-Muslim practices will affect Muslims negatively. Yeoh Seng Guan, "Religious Pluralism and Cosmopolitanism at the City Crossroads," in *Religious Diversity in Muslim-Majority States in Southeast Asia*, eds. Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014), 270–71. Complaints about Buddhist statues are also voiced by Muslims in dialogues: see below.

by the Muslim authority.[39] Moreover, Buddhist monks' skills in healing and magic have been highly popular among Malay Muslims in the border provinces of both Thailand and Malaysia, especially in Kelantan, which amply demonstrates the ease with which cultural borders are crossed and worldviews shared between Buddhists and Muslims on the ground.[40] Chinese Malaysians, on their part, also appropriate elements of the Muslim tradition, for example by visiting the tombs of Malay Muslim saints alongside venerating Buddhist *bodhisattva*s and other deities.[41]

2 Dialogue Initiatives in Thailand and Malaysia

Within contemporary Southeast Asia, both Thailand and Malaysia have been particularly active in hosting Buddhist-Muslim dialogues, perhaps due to the socio-political issues that have been unfolding within their borders. These meetings, however, have highly different settings and atmospheres depending on their intended aims. Sessions for the purpose of resolving communal issues or conflict are usually arranged domestically, whereas those meant for academic discussions and/or broader socio-cultural exchanges are often internationally organized, with participants invited from both within and without Southeast Asia. In the first type of dialogue, impending practical problems or complaints are often brought up. For example, a one-day conference on the theme of "Common Religious Values for Nation Building," held in Malaysia on 7 April 1984, attended by representatives of the five minority religions in Malaysia and some Muslim politicians, had the non-Muslim representatives asking for more rights to build places of worship, as well as freedom of conversion.[42] Similarly in an event titled "Buddhism-Islam Dialogue – Violence

39 Mohamed Yusoff Ismail, "Buddhism in a Muslim State: Theravada Practices and Religious Life in Kelantan," *The Muslim World* 100: 2–3 (2010), 321, 326–7.

40 See, e.g., Louis Golomb, *Brokers of Morality: Thai Ethnic Adaptation in a Rural Malaysian Setting* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978); Irving Chan Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Veranda* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 6–7; Ismail, "Buddhism in a Muslim State," 328.

41 Tan, *Chinese Religion in Malaysia*, 70.

42 On this occasion, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism was formally launched. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, Tan Chee Khoon, Chandra Muzaffar, and Lim Kit Siang, *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1984); see 204–5 for the fundamental objectives of the Council. Though not a Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, this session provide indicators about the types of issues and perceptions that Muslims and non-Muslims have about one another in Malaysia.

and Reconciliation" on 24 November 2005, hosted by Mahidol University along with the organs of the Thai government such as the National Reconciliation Commission, the Civilian Affairs Department of the Thai Supreme Command Headquarters, and others, Muslim participants complained about the Buddhist lack of awareness regarding how copies of the Qur'an should be treated according to Islam.[43]

The domestic dialogues tend to be intense and can involve strong expressions of rejection of the other tradition(s). In the above-mentioned Malaysian session, Muslim participants dismissed the practice of "idol-worship" as "disbelief" according to Islam, and requested that no representations be seen in public, as they "disturb peace in the country." Not accepting that they worship idols, Buddhist participants responded by complaining that Muslim "allegations … [are] as unfair as [they are] untrue."[44] Where the underlying sense of mutual suspicion is strong, moreover, the participants are particularly sensitive and resistant to accounts accompanying the other side's theological perspectives, even when these are made as friendly gestures. This is particularly true of remarks of an inclusivist nature. When reacting to a Muslim participant's description of the Buddha as a prophet and messenger, for example, a Buddhist participant in the aforementioned Thai session remarked that, while such ideas would be tolerated in the seminar room, they "will bring about grave consequences" outside it, causing the moderator to interrupt the exchange.[45] Such angry refusals attest to the seriousness of the political tension within society. At the same time, they also suggest that discussing theological perspectives, even those potentially accommodating toward the religious others, can exacerbate a latent sense of antagonism.[46]

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43 This was one of the Muslim-Buddhist dialogues aimed at ending violent confrontations in the three southern provinces of Thailand in 2004 and 2005, incidents that had already produced more than a thousand victims. It had six participants on both the Buddhist and the Muslim sides. Teddy Prasetyo, "Thailand: Buddhism-Islam Dialogue Aimed at Ending Violence and Promoting Greater Religious Understanding," *Current Dialogue* 46 (2005), 56–8.

44 Putra et al., *Contemporary Issues*, 99, 156–7.

45 Prasetyo, "Thailand: Buddhism-Islam Dialogue," 58.

46 It is further possible that the risk that inclusivist views such as the Muslim recognition of the historical Buddha as a prophet backfire is higher when they are voiced by a member of a minority religion. In a heartfelt attempt at comparing Buddhism and Islam, a Muslim writer from Myanmar, another Southeast Asian Buddhist-majority nation, was extremely careful not to offend his Buddhist fellow country folks by suggesting that the Buddha may be considered a Muslim prophet. He emphasized that considering the Buddha is a sincerely friendly gesture from the Muslim side toward Buddhists, rather than an insult. San Oo Aung, "Common Virtues of Buddhism and Islam" (26 November 2007) http://sanooaung.wordpress.com/2007/11/26/common-virtues-of-buddhism-and-islam [accessed 27

Dialogue sessions that are organized outside the immediate context of conflict resolution, on the other hand, tend to be arranged internationally in a more peaceful atmosphere. The first official Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Southeast Asia, titled "Alternative Politics for Asia" and held in Penang, Malaysia on 11–13 October 1996, featured Chandra Muzaffar (1947-), a Malaysian Muslim scholar and president of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) , and Sulak Sivaraksa (1933-), a British-educated Thai Buddhist teacher and president of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) as main speakers.[47] This was followed up, ten years later, by a three-day dialogue on the theme "Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia working towards justice and peace," held in Bangkok on 26–28 June 2006, which had Paisal Visalo (1957-), a Thai Buddhist monk known for his active engagement with social issues, as well as Sulak and Muzaffar, as keynote speakers. This second dialogue was organized in response to the worsening of the situation in southern Thailand and resulted in the Dusit Declaration.[48]

Given the long history of Buddhist-Muslim interactions in Southeast Asia, these sessions emphasize "harmonious coexistence."[49] The sense of solidarity of co-religionists also seems to serve as their common ground, which often manifested itself as rallying together against phenomena like globalization (or "Western dominance"), secularism, capitalism, materialism, and consumerism.[50] Where regional and local socio-political issues are taken up, the emphasis is laid on shared values between Buddhism and Islam contributing to peace

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October 2022]. The extremely careful wording used in this example clearly transmits the sense of trepidation for the risk of potentially upsetting the Buddhist majority in his country.

47 The dialogue was organized by the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), with a total of 23 participants from Thailand and Malaysia. It formed part of the project "Alternatives to Consumerism." Sulak Sivaraksa and Chandra Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics for Asia: A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue* (Selangor: International Movement for a Just World, 1999).

48 The event was organized jointly by the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (SPDI), International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), and International Movement for a Just World (JUST), and had a total of 35 participants from eight countries. INEB, "The Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue," *Seeds of Peace* 22–3 (2006), 15. For the Dusit Declaration, see INEB, "Dusit Declaration," *Seeds of Peace* 22–3 (2006), 22–5.

49 Sulak and Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics*, ix; Chandra Muzaffar, "Buddhists and Muslims in Asia," *Seeds of Peace* 22–3 (2006), 20–21; Sulak and Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics*, 107–8; INEB, "Dusit Declaration," 22–3.

50 Sulak and Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics*, ix, 25; Muzaffar, "Buddhists and Muslims in Asia," 20–22.

and justice in the region.[51] Although the speakers do not engage in detailed theological discussions, in the rare cases in which they do mention major concepts of Buddhism and Islam together, they tend to take a generally parallelist approach. In the 1996 dialogue, for example, Muzaffar observed that there are "certain parallels [on] the level of ethics and values" between Buddhism and Islam that should be used to further dialogue and improve understanding. During the same meeting, Sulak and Muzaffar also mention Buddhist concepts that could be equated with that of God in Islam. According to Sulak, Buddhist Dharma, being the "universal law … [can be called] God, [though] not in the personified way,"[52] while Muzaffar suggested that "Buddhists incorporate … [Buddhadasa's] notion of God, in its non-creator sense, within their theological framework."[53] These remarks suggest an awareness of the importance of recognizing a Buddhist equivalent of the Islamic concept of God in establishing a basis for mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims, which would provide a doctrinal basis for the other parallels.

On the other hand, the recent dialogue initiatives that are domestically organized, whether meetings with leaders of major religious communities or projects undertaken by leading (often state-sponsored) universities, reflect the inter-religious relations within the society in question. In Thailand, most domestic Buddhist-Muslim dialogues are organized for the specific purpose of alleviating communal tensions, especially in the south, or have the strained relationships between Buddhists and Muslims operating as the subtext.[54] Even the dialogues set in academic contexts are geared toward the possible rectification

51 INEB, "Dusit Declaration," 23. Apart from the frequent reference to the conflict in southern Thailand, the issues concerning non-Muslim minorities in Malaysia are also mentioned. INEB, "Dusit Declaration," 24. It is intriguing that the Dusit Declaration emphasizes the importance of fostering "inclusive and universal" attitudes, rather than "exclusive" ones, toward the religious others. INEB, "Dusit Declaration," 23, 25. Although these terms may not refer to specific stances developed within the theology of religions (see Chapter 1), the use of the term "universal" instead of "plural" may reflect the notoriety that the latter has acquired in Malaysia.

52 Sulak and Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics*, 55. Sulak also juxtaposes God and nature, presumably regarding the latter as a Buddhist equivalent of God in Islam: ibid., 24.

53 Sulak and Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics*, 108. For Buddhadasa's view, see Chapter 4.

54 Many of the inter-religious sessions involving Buddhists and Muslims are trialogues: between Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Some dialogues organized for the specific purpose of alleviating the tension between Buddhist and Muslim communities are mediated by Christians, making them *de facto* trialogues. For example, see Weena Kowitwanij, "Church Promotes Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue in Order to Stop Violence," *Asia News* (8 November 2005) <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Church-promotes-Muslim-Buddhist-dialogue-in-order-to-stop-violence-4565.html> [accessed 10 August 2022].

of this plight, at least indirectly. Given the lingering mutual suspicion between some Buddhist and Muslim participants, however, such enterprises can prove to be a double-edged sword, as events involving both groups carry an inherent risk of aggravating their already tense relations, while they undoubtedly have the potential to improve on it. This emerged clearly from perhaps the most ambitious project undertaken in recent years in the area of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Thailand at the above-mentioned Mahidol University. In 2013, the International Center for Buddhist-Muslim Understanding was established at Mahidol's College of Religious Studies, with a view to furthering academic research on Buddhist-Muslim relations and facilitating the mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims.[55] Under the leadership of its inaugural Director, Imtiyaz Yusuf, a Tanzania-born scholar of Religious Studies and Islam with an Indian Muslim background, the Center organized a series of international conferences over the ensuing few years.[56] The first conference, held on 3–4 October 2013, was titled "Compassion: A Bridge between Buddhism and Islam." While it featured presentations by scholars and religious leaders invited from both within and without Southeast Asia (many from Malaysia), the dialogue was particularly notable in successfully providing a much-needed opportunity for Buddhist and Muslim leaders in Thailand to meet and befriend each other.[57] However, within about five years of its opening, the Center's operations came to a standstill.[58] This was primarily due to the limited support it

55 Based on communications I received while working at this College, the whole Buddhist-Muslim initiative was undertaken in response to a request from some segments within the government. The College also inaugurated a new MA program in Buddhism and Islam in the same year, which eventually produced only one graduate.

56 Yusuf also worked actively to promote Buddhist-Muslim relations on a more communal level. During his stint at Mahidol University, for example, he also taught courses on Islam at the aforementioned Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, where it was unprecedented to have a Muslim instructor. Yusuf won the trust of his monastic students, so arranged a visit to an Islamic center in Bangkok for them, exposing them to the local Thai Muslim community. Such opportunities for dialogue and more casual opportunities for meeting that he created were appreciated by both Buddhists and Muslims, thanks to his care and knowledge as well as the deep familiarity he established with scholars and religious leaders in Thailand.

57 For a report of this conference (and photos of Buddhist monks and Muslim imams hugging each other), see Imtiaz Muqbil, "Early Warning: Everting the Next Looking Threat to ASEAN Peace and Prosperity," *Travel Impact Newswire* (7 October 2013) http://www.travel-impact-newswire.com/2013/10/early-warning-averting-the-next-looming-threat-to-asean-peace-prosperity/#axzz7Lx3AVlIC [accessed 25 February 2022].

58 The Center closed in 2019, as Yusuf relocated to Malaysia. Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Building Muslim-Buddhist Understanding: The Parallels of *Taqwa*/Allah consciousness in the Qur'an and *Satipatthana*/Mindfulness in *Anapanasati Sutta*," in *Overcoming Orientalism: Essays in Honor of John L. Esposito*, ed. Tamara Sonn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 174.

managed to garner within the College, both at faculty level as well as among its administrative staff. Moreover, the range of activities involving Islam was increasingly seen as contravening the original aim of the College, which was the development of the study of religion, primarily identified with Buddhism. This example suggests that, despite the urgent need recognized among some intellectuals and political figures for Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Thailand, it is difficult to maintain a regular dialogue program due to the resistance encountered among various segments of the Buddhist majority of the country, both monastic and lay.

Efforts at promoting Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Malaysia, on the other hand, have been on the increase in the last decade, both at academic and NGO levels. Two potential factors can be identified as encouraging this development. The first is the heightening of the sense of Buddhist identity among Chinese Malaysians through Buddhist revivalist movements. While part of this development has been a response to the increasing Islamization within the country, the revivalism also has more pronounced transnational dimensions, which involve not only connections with Chinese-speaking Buddhist communities in East Asia[59] but also an increasing interest in other types of Buddhism, such as Tibetan and Theravāda traditions, which may also have contributed to the growing tendency to highlight the Buddhist identity among Chinese Malaysians.[60] The increased emphasis on Buddhist identity among Chinese Malaysians may also have encouraged Malay Muslims to recognize Buddhism as their primary religion, thereby facilitating the idea of a Buddhist-Muslim rather than a Confucian-Muslim dialogue, for instance.[61]

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59 For the revitalization of Buddhism among Chinese Malaysians, see Tan Lee Ooi, *Buddhist Revitalization and Chinese Religions in Malaysia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), Ch. 4.

60 The Vajrayana Buddhist Council of Malaysia (VBCM) and the Theravāda Buddhist Council of Malaysia (TBCM) were officially established in 2002 and 2012 respectively. Vajrayana Buddhist Council of Malaysia, "Introduction," https://vbcm.org.my/Intro.html; Theravāda Buddhist Council of Malaysia, "Theravāda Buddhist Council of Malaysia," https://www.tbcm.org.my/about-tbcm [both accessed 26 June 2022].

61 Confucianism used to be identified as the main religion of Chinese Malaysians. One of the earliest systematic academic attempts at inter-religious dialogue, organized by the University of Malaya, was held between Islam and Confucianism on 12–14 March 1995, in anticipation of the founding of the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue at the same university in 1996. While the focus of this event may partly reflect the increasing importance of China for Malaysia, it is clear from the contributions of Osman Bakar and Chandra Muzaffar, two key Muslim scholars who were instrumental in the founding of the abovementioned Centre, that in the domestic context of Muslim-Chinese relations in

The second reason for the rise in the number of Buddhist-Muslim dialogues in Malaysia is the government-led promotion of inter-religious events.[62] They typically occur on the initiative of state-sponsored Islamic universities and research institutions, such as the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) and the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).[63] Such

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Malaysia, Confucianism is considered the primary religion of Chinese Malaysians. Osman Bakar, "Confucius and the Analects in the Light of Islam," in *Islam and Confucianism: A Civilizational Dialogue,* eds. Osman Bakar and Cheng Gek-Nai (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1997), 63. Chandra Muzaffar, "Islam-Confucianism Dialogue: Its Significance for Ethnic Relations in Malaysia," in *Islam and Confucianism: A Civilizational Dialogue,* eds. Osman Bakar and Cheng Gek-Nai (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1997), 141. This perception may be based on Confucianism originating in China, rather than the religious identity claimed by Chinese Malaysians themselves. In the 1980 census, for example, more than half of Chinese Malaysians identified as Buddhists, while only 12% as Confucians. Nagata, "Limits to the Indigenisation," 315.

62 Perhaps due to the perceived need to enhance the "ethnic relations" within the country, these domestic sessions often feature representatives of all major religions, with "harmony" emphasized in their titles: see, e.g., IKIM, "The Programme on Dialogue Among Religious Adherents," and "Universiti Teknikal Malaysia (UTeM), Technical University of Malaysia (UTeM)," *IKIM Bulletin* (April-June 2017), 4 and 5 respectively; IKIM, "Harmony Forum on 'Celebrating Diversity and Harmony among Religious Adherents,'" *IKIM Bulletin* (Jan.–Feb. 2018), 6. Yet, as will be mentioned below, it is not clear to what extent urgent communal issues are addressed on such occasions, as the topics are often global issues such as climate change.

63 The first official project of inter-religious dialogue was undertaken by the University of Malaya in 1995: see above on their first dialogue event. As far as the official website of the University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD) reveals, relatively few direct dialogues with Malaysian Buddhists have been organized. Between 2001 and 2022 there were two such events: the "Dialogue on Islam and Buddhism in conjunction with the Celebration of Exhibition the Lotus Sutra – A Message of Peace and Harmonious Coexistence," co-organized with Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) on 13 April 2014; and a seminar titled "Reflection of Peace: Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue," co-organized with the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM) and the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) on 16 May 2015; while a public lecture on "Buddhist Perspective on Co-Existence with Special Reference to Sri Lanka," co-organized with UM Academy of Islamic Studies on 17 May 2019 most likely included a discussion on the increasingly strained Buddhist-Muslim relations in Sri Lanka: UMCCD, "Activities – 2014," https://dialogue.um.edu.my/activities-2014; "Activities – 2015," https://dialogue.um.edu.my/activities-2015; "Activities – 2019," https://dialogue.um.edu.my/activities-2019 [all accessed 10 August 2022] respectively. As for IKIM, too, dialogue sessions focused on Buddhism and Islam are limited, one rare example is the International Buddhist-Muslim Forum for Peace and Sustainability, held on 1 November 2013, where IKIM collaborated with the International Movement for a Just World and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, the two aforementioned pioneer organizations in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue. Vidyananda, "A Reflection and Report on the Recent INEB Conference in Kuala Lumpur," *Seeds of Peace* 30: 1 (2014), 10–13.

inter-religious events, however, have been undertaken with much caution, for fear of reactions from conservative Malay Muslims.[64] The meetings are often closed to the general public and certain topics and ideas are considered off-limits, to prevent tension.[65] One of the themes that is carefully avoided is religious pluralism, understood as a stance that recognizes equal validity and truth in all religious traditions. Starting with the fatwa issued by the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia against pluralism in 2006, the pluralist position has become taboo among Muslims in Malaysia.[66] This trend has become particularly pronounced since 2010, with various major institutions and organizations, including the then Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (in 2012), issuing statements to denounce pluralism as un-Islamic.[67] As a consequence, scholars

64 Hoffstaedter, "Religious Pluralism in Malaysia," 41; Aemy Elyani Mat Zain, Jaffary Awang, and Idris Zakara, "Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Perspective of Malaysian Contemporary Muslim Thinkers," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 5 (2014), 2.

65 Hoffstaedter, "Religious Pluralism in Malaysia," 41, 47. The degree of openness may have changed slightly with the COVID-19 pandemic, in that many events came to be held online and thus are open to a global audience provided they register in advance, while domestic inter-religious sessions seem to remain exclusive.

66 Religious pluralism was first banned in Indonesia in 2005, when the Indonesian Council of Ulama issued a fatwa prohibiting Muslims from adhering to pluralism, liberalism, and secularism. On this parallel development in Indonesia and Malaysia, where a conservative turn has been observed among their Muslim majorities for the last two decades, see Syafiq Hasyim, "Religious Pluralism Revisited: Discursive Patterns of the Ulama Fatwa in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Studia Islamika* 26: 3 (2019), 475–509.

67 This development began with the public speech given by Anwar Ibrahim in London in March 2010, in which he emphasized, in response to the recent "exclusivist" turn among Muslims in Malaysia as seen in the previously mentioned Allah controversy, the importance of religious pluralism for the realization of the freedom of religion stipulated in the Malaysian Constitution, regarding it as being in line with the teachings of the Qur'an. Anwar Ibrahim, "Religion and Pluralism in a Divided World," public lecture given at the London School of Economics (18 March 2010) https://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-player?id=621 [accessed 6 March 2022]; Haslina Ibrahim, "The Quest for Objectivity: Religious Pluralism and Religious Plurality in Malaysia," paper presented at the Roundtable Seminar on Religious Pluralism, the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, IIUM (30 January 2015), 1–2. One of the earliest reactions was made by IKIM: Jamaludin and Ibrahim, "The Muslims' Response," 60–61; IKIM, "Press Statement: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) on Religious Pluralism" (23 December 2010) https://www.malaysia-today.net/2010/12/23/press-statement-institute-of-islamic-understanding-malaysia-ikim-on-religious-pluralism [accessed 6 March 2022]. For Najib's statement, see News Insider, "Malaysia PM: LGBTS, Liberalism, Pluralism are Enemies of Islam," *The Malaysian Insider* (20 July 2012) https://www.fridae.asia/gay-news/2012/07/20/11812.malaysia-pm-lgbts-liberalism-pluralism-are-enemies-of-islam [accessed 6 March 2022].

feel compelled to pay close attention to what they state in public so as not to be taken as holding a pluralist stance.[68]

The dismissal of pluralist views may partly explain why a parallelist format is often employed in recent Buddhist-Muslim dialogues, where (a) a concept or an issue shared by Buddhism and Islam is chosen as the main theme of the dialogue to highlight the compatibility of the two traditions, but (b) related topics are discussed by Buddhist and Muslim participants from the perspective of their respective traditions, without needing to engage directly the other tradition. A good example of this format is the online conference organized by the International Institute of Islamic Civilisation and Malay World (ISTAC-IIUM) on "Rahmah and Karuna: Compassion as Common Ground for Building Understanding between Islam and Buddhism," on 27 January 2021.[69] While this type of event where participants with different religious backgrounds each address the same topic from the viewpoint of their tradition is not uncommon in inter-religious dialogues, this particular event is notable in that parallel concepts are emphasized consistently throughout the sessions.[70] Given its setting as a "national conference," the participants combined general comparative observations and remarks specifically related to the domestic situation. In his keynote speech, for example, Bhante Mahinda, a Theravāda Buddhist teacher of ethnic Chinese background, recognized the presence of a "gulf" between Buddhism and Islam, emphasizing the familiar theism-non-theism distinction. Yet he further observed that if one believes God to be all-knowing and all-merciful, you are "nothing," regarding this as a "common ground" between Buddhism and Islam, because in Buddhism the egoistic thoughts of "I, my, me, mine" are also denied; "we are nothing." He also made a point of asserting

68 Although the concept of religious pluralism is not regarded as problematic in Thailand, a Malaysian participant in the above-mentioned 2013 dialogue organized by the Center for Buddhist-Muslim Understanding repeatedly denied being a pluralist while giving a speech.

69 This event consisted of three sessions titled "Rahmah and Karuna – Compassion in Islam and Buddhism," "Rahmah and Karuna – in Living Islam and Living Buddhism," and "Rahmah and Karuna – as Tools for Mediation for Harmonious Race Relations," discussed by Buddhist and Muslim scholars/religious leaders, all coming from within Malaysia. IIUM, "National Virtual Conference on Rahmah and Karuna," (n.d.) https://www.iium.edu.my/my/events/show/national-virtual-conference-on-rahmah-and-karuna [accessed 9 November 2023]. The following information is based on the notes taken by the present author during the conference.

70 This emphasis may be attributed to the involvement of Imtiyaz Yusuf, who moved to the IIUM in 2019, where he is in charge of the Islam and Buddhism Program at ISTAC-IIUM. It is also notable that he was the only presenter at this conference who discussed both traditions in detail by engaging with Buddhist teachings from an Islamic perspective.

that Buddhists are not idol-worshippers, but that they contemplate the qualities of the Buddha and try to live out these ideals. This may be a response to the common accusation that Buddhists receive from Muslims in Malaysia for being idolatrous, and thereby practicing a religion diametrically opposed to Islam. To dissipate the suspicion, he further remarked that the Buddhist practice of contemplating the qualities of the Buddha is comparable to the way in which Muslims pray to God, think of His attributes, try to live mercifully, and so on. The commonality he found between the Buddhist and Islamic practices involves not only a parallel between their structures and purposes, but also suggests an implicit parallel between their conceptions of the ultimate truth, i.e., the Buddha and God, as the ultimate source and inspiration for goodness in human life.

Osman Bakar, on the other hand, was more cautious about extending the parallels too far. After exploring how the semantic quality of the Buddhist term *karuṇā* has been retained in the Malay-Muslim culture by tracing the spiritual trajectory of the Malays from Buddhism to Islam, he pointed out that such a historical connection does not necessarily speak for the identity of Buddhist and Islamic teachings. According to him, the Islamic notion of *raḥmah*, which has two aspects, i.e., divine and human, occupies a "broader semantic field" than the Buddhist notion of compassion, whose importance he nevertheless recognizes in Buddhist practice. Commenting on why the Buddha never fought wars while Prophet Muhammad did, he pointed out that different spiritual leaders show compassion in different ways. He further argued that compassion is shown not only in peaceful times but also during wars, as seen in the episode where Muhammad pardoned his enemies after conquering Mecca, adding that the latter is more difficult. Osman Bakar's observations suggest that the possibility of parallelism between God and the Buddha depends on the extent to which the Buddha is considered "divine" or super-human (whose power or qualities permeate and rule the universe), rather than simply being a personality of exceptional spiritual achievement.

Some of the recent initiatives of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Malaysia have a more global scope, by virtue of having main/keynote speakers invited from outside the region. This pattern is found in sessions organized by universities and NGOs/NPOs alike, and is manifest most notably through their involvement of the Dalai Lama. For example, the "Online Islam-Buddhism Forum," jointly organized by the Tibetan Buddhist Cultural Centre Malaysia (TBCC) and the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) on 28 September 2020 on the topic of "Compassion and Mercy as the Common Values between Islam

and Buddhism," featured the Dalai Lama and Osman Bakar as the main speakers.[71] Opining that the main purpose of inter-religious dialogue is to broaden the commonalities and minimize the differences, or respect them when they cannot be minimized, Osman Bakar observed that mercy is the essence of all religions, known through various expressions in different traditions: *raḥmah* in Islam and *karuṇā* in Buddhism. The Dalai Lama concurred, observing that compassion is part of human nature and the key to human survival. He emphasized the importance of achieving a "hygiene of emotion," whereby negative destructive emotions are to be eliminated through compassion, regarding this as the basis of religious harmony. While suggesting that Islamic practice is similarly geared toward reducing the ego and achieving inner peace, Osman Bakar further problematized "our own ignorance" of commonalities, referring to Muslims in Malaysia as an example—one of the very few references made to Malaysia in the entire session. The problem, according to him, is that people are focused on differences rather than commonalities, and this applies to the variety of interpretations within Islam itself. Suggesting the need for intra-religious dialogue alongside inter-religious dialogue, he asserted that Muslims should learn the *adab* (civility) of respecting different interpretations. Although no specific mention was made of inter-religious relations in Malaysia, his decision to refer to intra-Muslim relations may reflect the difficulty he has experienced in dealing with the increasingly exclusive tendency found among many Muslims in his own country.[72]

The global purview of the recent inter-religious dialogues in Malaysia is also confirmed by the focus on topics of universal relevance, such as ecology and environmental issues. The two aforementioned groups, TBCC and ABIM, have initiated a further program called "Islam-Buddhism Eco Dialogue," Its first full-scale conference, organized in collaboration with the ISTAC-IIUM, the Theravāda Buddhist Council of Malaysia, the Vajrayana Buddhist Council of Malaysia, and the International Students of Islamic Psychology, took place on 15–16 January 2022 on the theme of "Application of Religion and Science to Ecology and Sustainability: Perspectives from Islam and Buddhism," The Dalai

71 His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, "Compassion and Mercy – Common Values between Islam and Buddhism" (28 September 2020) https://www.dalailama.com/news/2020/compassion-and-mercy-common-values-between-islam-and-buddhism [accessed 26 June 2022].

72 Osman Bakar also advocated the restoration of the "inclusive" and "moderate" spirit of the Qur'an so that Muslims can better embrace the contemporary challenges, including religious diversity. Osman Bakar, "Islam and the Challenge of Diversity and Pluralism: Must Islam Reform Itself?" *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 1: 1 (2009), 55–73, see esp. 66–7.

Lama was scheduled as the chief guest (although he had to cancel his participation); and Reza Shah-Kazemi, a British scholar of comparative religion with a Pakistani background, gave the keynote speech. Almost half the speakers of the five panels, each of which had a Buddhist and a Muslim speaker, were based outside Southeast Asia.[73] Given the international profiles of the speakers and the topics of more global importance, reference to socio-political issues directly concerning Buddhist-Muslim relations in Malaysia, such as those affecting the rights of minority religious groups, was limited, despite all the organizers being Malaysia-based and many attendees coming from within Southeast Asia. It is possible that the global perspective, or the focus on "common issues and challenges,"[74] has helped the organizers circumvent the potential difficulty arising from having to discuss thorny socio-political issues unfolding at home, given the understandable reluctance of some speakers (as well as members of the audience) to raise them.[75] However, the transposition of themes of Buddhist-Muslim dialogues from a domestic to a global arena plays the role of keeping alive the idea of inter-religious dialogue and, occasionally, indirectly discussing issues of domestic interest 'by proxy.'

Buddhist-Muslim relations in both Thailand and Malaysia have faced challenges of communal tension, and inter-religious dialogue has been pursued as a possible means to alleviate it. The structures and contents, as well as outcomes, of these dialogues reveal significant differences reflecting the challenges faced by Buddhists and Muslims and policies concerning inter-religious dialogue in the two countries. It is by no means possible to compare the overall levels of success of the dialogue initiatives in the two societies, yet those in Malaysia seem to have fared better in recent decades. One cannot discount the fact that Malaysia does not face an extremely tense conflict, including armed insurgency like the one unfolding in southern provinces of Thailand. However,

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73 Islam-Buddhism Eco Dialogue, "IBED Conference 15 & 16 January 2022, Application of Religion and Science to Ecology and Sustainability: Perspectives from Islam and Buddhism" https://www.ibedconf.com and "Speakers" https://www.ibedconf.com/speakers.html [both accessed 1 February 2024].

74 This emphasis was also found in the context of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue held at IKIM in November 2013. Vidyananda, "A Reflection and Report," 13. For another example of an inter-religious dialogue focused on environmental issues, see Aqilah (IKIM), "Dialog Antara Penganut Agama 'Panduan Agama Dalam Menangani Krisis Alam Sekitar,'" *E-Bulletin IKIM* (2 November 2015) https://www.ikim.gov.my/new-wp/index.php/2015/11/03/dialog-antara-penganut-agama-panduan-agama-dalam-menangani-krisis-alam-sekitar [accessed 5 March 2022].

75 According to Osman Bakar, (Muslim) political and religious leaders in Malaysia are still unwilling to "see ethnic and religious grievances, especially coming from non-Malays and non-Muslims, to be discussed in the open": Bakar, "Islam and the Challenge," 69–70.

the most significant factor in the difference seems to be the state-led promotion of dialogue in Malaysia, coupled with the interventions of the government on the nature of the dialogue and the attendant self-censorship among the organizers and participants.[76] It is also such mechanisms of state control and self-censorship that have encouraged keen proponents of dialogue to come up with new ways of relating to and accommodating their religious others, using a parallelist format. The next chapter will explore further how the strained majority-minority relations and the restrictive socio-political parameters such as the prohibition of pluralist views have led to the increasing use of parallelism in Southeast Asia.

76 These socio-political parameters may also be the reason behind the active involvement with dialogue by Islamic revivalist groups such as ABIM, which are fundamentally opposed to religious pluralism. Jamaludin and Ibrahim, "The Muslims' Response," 59. While such mechanisms of censorship, which help protect the privileged status of the Malay Muslim majority, may encourage them to continue engaging in inter-religious dialogues, they make it harder for Muslim participants with accommodating attitudes toward their religious others to express themselves freely, thereby potentially hampering the development of deeper dialogue.

CHAPTER 4

Southeast Asia as a Fertile Ground for Parallelism? Emerging Trends in Contemporary Buddhist-Muslim Engagements

The interplay between global religious discourses and specific local contexts involving Buddhists and Muslims has informed their modes of perception and engagement in Southeast Asia, producing various socio-political contestations in both Thailand and Malaysia. The present chapter demonstrates that such local or communal conundrums have at the same time led variably to new dialogue initiatives and creative theological approaches evidenced notably in the birth of parallelist views. In other words, the majority-minority contestations in Southeast Asia have produced a fertile ground for new theological attempts to produce affinity between Buddhism and Islam, to challenge the divisive socio-political discourse of difference. While this regional trend is being led by Imtiyaz Yusuf, Southeast Asia has also been an important reference ground for major proponents of parallelism based outside the region, such as Alexander Berzin and Reza Shah-Kazemi, who have been inspired or encouraged by their involvement in the regional initiatives, especially with Muslim Southeast Asia.

Generally speaking, the writings on Buddhism and Islam published in Thailand and Malaysia show similar trends to those found in the Buddhist-Muslim dialogue initiatives discussed in the previous chapter. Substantial mutual references between Buddhists and Muslims have been very rare in Thailand. Direct theological engagements with Islam are extremely limited among Thai Buddhists, with one exception made by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906–1993), through his engagement with Christianity.[1] The contributions from the Muslim side, on the other hand, originate almost entirely from Imtiyaz Yusuf.

Buddhists and Muslims in Malaysia have similarly been reticent about each other's traditions, with major input coming from Yusuf (now relocated from Thailand). However, some Malaysian Buddhists, as seen in the vocal contribution recently made by See Hoon Peow, have started to express their frustration at the perceived unfair treatment of non-Islamic religions in Malaysia, pointing

1 Thai Buddhist leaders who have been actively involved in inter-religious dialogue, such as Sulak Sivaraksa and Paisal Visalo (both discussed in Chapter 3), tend to have a socially engaged, activist inclination, producing little by way of theological reflection.

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to the possible increase in the level of Buddhist engagement with the discourse on religion in the country. The interest in Buddhist-Muslim engagements has also increased in recent years especially among the younger generation of Muslim scholars,[2] with some authors directly comparing the two traditions, thereby breaking the long silence that had existed in this field. The emergence of new comparative discussions is likely the result (at least partly) of the state-led promotion of inter-religious dialogue discussed earlier, while the gradual spread of parallelist approaches in such explorations seems to reflect the anti-pluralist stance that has become the object of a general (if tacit) consensus in the Malaysian discourse on religious diversity.

Two inter-related reasons can be highlighted as to why those who are originally from Southeast Asia have long tended to refrain from undertaking detailed theological reflections on Buddhism and Islam. The first is the urgent need to focus on practical socio-political issues, which may make theological discussions secondary in terms of practical importance. In such stringent circumstances, scholarly discussions focused on religious teachings may be perceived as a sheer luxury, if not a waste of time and energy. This would be particularly true given the common view that Buddhist and Islamic teachings are irreconcilable; or, at least, that comparing two traditions so different from each other would not help alleviate communal tensions. If anything, they would make it worse. This leads to the second reason, namely, the mutual suspicion lingering between Buddhists and Muslims due to the existing communal tensions. As seen in the discussion of Buddhist-Muslim dialogues in the previous chapter, theological reflections made from the perspective of one tradition can be held in great suspicion by the followers of the other tradition, even if those are made with the best of intention, to relate to their religious other and show that they accept the other tradition within the theological framework of their own tradition. Such suspicion, again, might exacerbate the tension further. It is also possible in the case of Malaysia that the practical ban on religious pluralism discourages scholars from expressing publicly views overtly accommodating their religious others.

What follows explores the ways in which the major contributors to Buddhist-Muslim theological engagements in Thailand and Malaysia attempt to overcome both doctrinal and socio-political barriers separating Buddhists from Muslims, by increasingly resorting to parallelism as a new means of relating to

2 One of the possible reasons why Buddhists in Malaysia refrain from discussing Islam may be because they are not supposed to intervene in Islamic issues.

their religious other(s) and navigating the rather unstable socio-political contexts in which they operate.

1 Buddhist Writings in Thailand

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa was an influential Thai Buddhist teacher of the Theravāda tradition with a "modernist/reformist" approach, known also for his active involvement with inter-religious dialogue.[3] Although his main interlocutors are Christians, he appropriates the Islamic concept of prophethood as the basis of his pluralistic view of religious diversity. Using the Buddhist doctrine of two truths,[4] he argues that all religions are essentially one and the same, if understood in "the language of Dhamma." However, they may appear to be different or incompatible with one another if seen from the point of view of conventional language.[5] According to this Buddhist teacher renowned for his innovative interpretations of Theravāda doctrines,[6] all religions share emptiness as the ultimate truth. He does not see emptiness as a specifically Buddhist notion.[7] As they all share the same truth of the Dhamma, he argues, "[o]nce one has grasped the concept of 'Dhamma', one becomes a good Buddhist, a good Christian, and a good Muslim all at once."[8]

Seeing the essence of religion as expressed differently in different religions,[9] he identifies what is called God in other religious traditions with the Dhamma. Based on the *ekayāna* (one-vehicle) thinking found in the *Lotus Sutra*, he

3 He is particularly known for his interpretation of *nirvāṇa* as attainable in lay life through the cultivation of the "empty mind" (Thai. *cit wang*). Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), see esp. 129–53; Donald K. Swearer, "Buddhadāsa," in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, ed. William M. Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2000), 191–2.

4 Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 55–6. The doctrine of two truths refers to the distinction between the conventional and ultimate truth, with the former, rendered in concrete language, being regarded as conveying only partial and provisional truth.

5 Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *No Religion* (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, [1969]), 2–4; Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, ([s.l.]: [s.n.], pref. 1967), 3–4.

6 As will be seen below, he also liberally employs major teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

7 Buddhadasa, *No Religion*, 6. He uses "voidness," but this translation has been replaced with emptiness for the purpose of clarity.

8 Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 123. Similar views have also been expressed by other prominent Buddhist teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh and K Sri Dhammananda. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 197. For the view of Dhammananda, see below.

9 Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, Introduction.

further argues that Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam provide the paths that emphasize wisdom, faith/trust, and willpower respectively, while also covering the other two qualities.[10] The differences of emphasis in the method of practice arose because the teachings have been adapted to the "environment, time, habits, mentality, temperament etc. of people."[11]

In developing his theory of all religions sharing in the same "Absolute Truth,"[12] Buddhadasa also invokes Islamic teachings to support his attempt to relate different religions with each other. He mentions the Qur'anic passage: "For every nation there is an apostle (10: 47),"[13] on the basis of which an agreement on doctrinal matters could be sought, calling it a "motto of good will."[14] According to him, the term 'apostle' means "a man of God who preaches the truth," and can be found in all religions, "including the teaching of the Buddha."[15] Yet this Thai monk recognizes something of a hierarchy in different conceptions of God. God is more personified and concrete on lower levels of understanding, while higher levels accord no conventional attributes to it,[16] which implies that the Buddhist concept of 'God' is more genuine than that of other traditions. Indeed, he argues that "God in conventional language is intended for people with childish ideas or childish way of thinking and therefore the garb of mythology has been used in order to make such people easily remember and believe in things pertaining to God," suggesting that such conceptions of God be demythologized.[17] It is notable, however, that despite recognizing some differences among the ways in which different religions conceive God, Buddhadasa regards the conventional distinction between

10 Ibid., 12–3. Buddhadasa is said to have valued Muslim prayers, hinting that dedicated female Buddhists should emulate the ways in which they "praise virtues." Tomomi Ito, *Modern Thai Buddhism and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: A Social History* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 228, 331.

11 Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 24–5.

12 Ibid., 27.

13 Ibid., 8. The original Arabic word is *rasūl*, i.e., messenger. Although the concept of prophethood is also mentioned in the Bible, Buddhadasa's extensive application of it seems to be inspired more directly by the Islamic notion of prophethood. While he did not discuss Islam at length, he had "intellectual associations" with Muslim scholars in Thailand already in the 1950s. Ito, *Modern Thai Buddhism*, 51.

14 Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 8.

15 Ibid., 27. Buddhadasa actively counts the Buddha among the biblical prophets. See Buddhadasa, *No Religion*, 15. The differences of emphasis in the paths of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam mentioned above could therefore be considered the work of the skillful means (*upāya*) of these 'apostles.' See also Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 199–200.

16 Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 64–6.

17 Ibid., 111.

atheistic religions (such as Buddhism and Jainism) and theistic ones (such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam) as "*very shallow*" in that it "*does not touch the real essence or meaning of religion*" [emphasis in original].[18] This remark shows Buddhadasa's awareness of the importance of overcoming the categorical straitjacket that has been hindering more substantial theological engagement between Buddhists and Muslims.

The idea of the Dhamma as the ultimate truth in its highest form is also manifested in Buddhadasa's view that various religious teachers who appeared at different times in specific circumstances, all came from the same God, the Dhamma. In a framework not dissimilar to the *trikāya* doctrine (see Chapter 1), he asserts that it is from Ādi Buddha that the various historical Buddhas such as Gotama Buddha appeared, including Jesus Christ amongst them, as its emanations.[19] This argument implies that he would also consider Prophet Muhammad as one of the historical Buddhas emanating from Ādi Buddha.

In working with the Buddhist concept of the ultimate truth and incorporating non-Buddhist religious leaders into the Buddhist worldview by extending Buddhahood to them, Buddhadasa's approach may be categorized as inclusivist.[20] Yet, he combines, and moves between, different stances. First, in arguing against the belief that "[one's own] religion is the best and the only way to salvation,"[21] he clearly works with a pluralist principle. Moreover, the inclusivist aspect of his discussion employs two doctrinal frameworks, namely the Muslim doctrine of prophethood and the *trikāya* doctrine of Buddhism. This dual-track approach suggests that, rather than establishing a thoroughly Buddhist theology of religions (see Chapter 1), his overall aim may lie beyond simply setting out an inclusive understanding of the religious others from a Buddhist perspective. One might say that his is an attempt at comparative inclusivism in a pluralist spirit, which seeks to demonstrate that pluralistic understandings are

18 Ibid., 66. He even suggested that Buddhism may be accepted (by Christians) as a theistic religion, albeit with the caveat that "God in Buddhism … is not anthropomorphic, but is the law of nature that creates and governs the universe": Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, "Interfaith Understanding in the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9 (1989), 234. According to him, the Dhamma represents various aspects of God in Christian conceptions, such as being the creator and omnipotent. Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 66–70.

19 Ibid., 105.

20 For a discussion of the inclusivist nature of Buddhadasa's stance, see Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 50–51. A view that all non-Buddhist traditions can be embraced under Buddhism is also found in Phra Kantipālo, *Tolerance: A Study from Buddhist Sources* (London: Rider & Co., 1964), 36–7.

21 Buddhadasa, "Interfaith Understanding," 233.

equally possible, and even inevitable, in all religious traditions.[22] Furthermore, it is even possible to see a seed of parallelism in Buddhadasa's approach, given (a) that the doctrine of prophethood and the *trikāya* doctrine are regarded as equal alternative explanations for the diversity of religious traditions in the world, and (b) his identification of the Dhamma with various aspects of God.[23]

Although Buddhadasa's theological reflections were not a direct response to particular socio-political situations, such as the conflict in southern Thailand that was intensifying toward the end of his life, they were geared toward the goal of inter-religious harmony and world peace. The active stance he took in dealing with the question of God, by proposing a Buddhist equivalent of God while challenging the conventional conception of God itself, reflects his awareness of how indispensable such a step is in promoting dialogue between Buddhists and the followers of so-called (mono)theistic religions. The new trend in consciously finding 'God' in Buddhism for the purpose of promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims has continued after Buddhadasa, with Imtiyaz Yusuf, Alexander Berzin, Reza Shah-Kazemi (all discussed below), and Rikyū Kono (discussed in Chapter 6), all of whom have employed a parallelist approach.[24]

Apart from Buddhadasa's example, most of the Thai writings on Buddhism and Islam are made by scholars who are involved in, or researching on, the reconciliation process for the southern Thailand conflict. However, none works on Buddhist-Muslim engagements continuously. While many avoid theological discussions, attempts to provide doctrinal underpinnings to peace-enhancing ideas are not totally absent.[25] Veerachart Nimanong, a Theravāda Buddhist

22 This possibility is supported by his statement that exclusivist views contradict "all valid religious principles." Ibid., 233.

23 It would be more appropriate, given the nature of the comparisons he makes, to use terms such as Godhead or Divine rather than God, a concept that has a heavily personified implication. Had he known about Sufi teachings, Buddhadasa would have also drawn parallels between his own distinction between the Dhamma language and the conventional language and the Sufi differentiation of the *ẓāhir* (outer) and the *bāṭin* (inner) meanings of the religious teachings.

24 For a preliminary analysis of this trend, see Obuse, "Finding God in Buddhism."

25 Chaiwat Satha-Anand (1955–2024), a Thai Muslim scholar of political science at Thammasat University, who was engaged in the reconciliation process in the south, compares the "sacred" narratives of the attitudes of Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, and the Buddha toward forgiveness, regarding this as a key concept that can alleviate the tension deriving from the violent communal confrontations continuing in various parts of Southeast Asia. Although he highlights the differences between Muhammad and the Buddha, attributing this to the Buddhist doctrine of *karma*, his comparative approach shows a possible seed of parallelism: Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "Forgiveness in Southeast

scholar based at Assumption University, Bangkok, highlights such concepts as tolerance, harmony, forgiveness, justice, and non-violence as common to Buddhist and Islamic teachings, which could facilitate the reconciliation process for the communal conflict unfolding in the south of the country. A particularly striking parallel he makes is through the notion of the Middle Way, the centerpiece of Buddhist teachings, which he sees as the root of the Islamic idea of justice. Drawing on the importance of moderation mentioned in the Qur'an (2: 143), Veerachart further observes that this is the ideal characteristic of a religious person according to any religion and that only through the presence of this quality is genuine inter-religious dialogue possible.[26] Drawing on Buddhadasa's idea that all religions are essentially the same at the level of the Dhamma language so that "there is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam," and in the same spirit of pluralism, he declares that "[a] good Buddhist should be a good Muslim."[27]

Asia: Political Necessity and Sacred Justifications," *Pacifica Review: Peace, Security and Global Change* 14: 3 (2002), 225–47.

26 Veerachart Nimanong, "The Religiously Pluralistic Harmony is the Necessary Condition for Sustainable Peace: a Thai Buddhist Perspective," paper presented at the seminar on the theme "Philosophy in New Age of Religious and Cultural Pluralism," co-organized by the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (CRVP), the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 6–7 July 2007.

27 Veerachart Nimanong, "Buddhist Spirituality and Interreligious Dialogue," *Mahachula Academic Journal* 3: 2 (2016), 176–7. While his view, like Buddhadasa's, has a pluralist (or pluralist-inclusivist) inclination, Veerachart argues that "to see unity in diversity is not sufficient to solve the [problem of] religious conflicting truth claims." He emphasizes the need to "go beyond Hick's theory of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism" by transcending the distinction between one and many, calling it "the middle way of pluralism": Veerachart Nimanong, "*Theravāda* Methods of Interpretation on Buddhist Scriptures," *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 6 (2006), 109–10. Buddhadasa's view is also used by Parichart Suwanbubbha, another Thai Theravāda Buddhist scholar who was involved in various inter-religious dialogue initiatives, in supporting a pluralist view of religions. Parichart Suwanbubbha, "A Theravada Buddhist-Christian Consultation towards a Culture of Religious Diversity and Communal Harmony, Organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Tao Fung Shan Centre, Shatin, Hong Kong, 2–6 July 2004," *Current Dialogue* 43 (July 2004) http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd43-06.html [accessed 31 March 2022].

2 Buddhist Writings in Malaysia

Over in Malaysia, one of the major Buddhist voices comes from K. Sri Dhammananda (1919–2006), a Sri Lankan-born Theravāda monastic based in Kuala Lumpur who dedicated much of his career to teaching Buddhism in Malaysia. Living in the religiously plural society of Malaysia, Dhammananda argues for the importance of respecting each other for the harmonious coexistence of different religious groups. Like the participants of Buddhist-Muslim dialogues discussed in the previous chapter, he emphasizes solidarity between followers of different traditions in standing united against the problems of modern secular society. He urges "every religionist … to try to understand the different environmental and cultural heritage of each [other],"[28] and to unite together "to eliminate various vices and immoral practices that are common in our modern society."[29] For this reason, Dhammananda also admonishes specifically against excessive proselytism and criticism directed at Buddhists by some religionists. Although not specified, these may include the accusation of idolatry, the primary point of censure that Muslims have often raised against Buddhists.[30] Noting that such acts would hinder the realization of "elusive peace and harmony," he argues:

> [I]n a multi-racial and multi-religious society like Malaysia, our religionists should not stand so low as to debase themselves by condemning or speaking ill of other religionists who have embraced religions formulated by illustrious religious leaders many centuries ago. … [E]veryone should feel free to sing praises for their respective religions but should, at all costs, refrain from slinging mud at one another. The mud will spill and the effects would be disastrous.[31]

28 K. Sri Dhammananda, "Religion in a Multi-Religious Society," http://www.ksridhammananda.com/pdf/RELIGION%20IN%20A%20MULTI%20RELIGIOUS%20SOCIETY-%20edited.pdf [accessed 31 March 2022], 4.

29 K. Sri Dhammananda, *Buddhist Attitude towards Other Religions* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1983) http://what-buddha-taught.net/Books6/Dhammananda_Buddhist_Attitude_towards_other_Religions.pdf [accessed 8 April 2010]. No page numbers.

30 He seems to be alluding to this when he says: "Many people are under a misapprehension that Buddhists pray to idols." K. Sri Dhammananda, "Are Buddhists Idol-Worshippers?" http://www.dhammatalks.net/Books6/Bhante_Dhammananda_Are_Buddhists_Idol_Worshippers.pdf [accessed 31 March 2022].

31 K. Sri Dhammananda, "Religion in a Multi-Religious Society," 6.

Dhammananda regards different religions as all teaching goodwill toward others, mentioning, for example, "the Sermon on the Mount in Christianity, the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism and the concept of Brotherhood in Islam."[32] He also agrees with Buddhadasa about the non-importance of religious labels, saying: "[i]f a man is good, he is naturally religious. It makes no difference whether he is a Buddhist, Muslim, Christianity [sic.] or Hindu."[33] However, this monk-scholar does not simply call them "all the same," as that would constitute "an intellectual hypocr[a]sy or [a] well-meaning lie," but rather views only their goal as the same.[34] While this may be based on his interpretation of Buddhist teachings, it can also be said to be a skillful way of bringing various traditions together without offending any by disregarding their particular doctrines.

A more direct comparative treatment of Buddhism and Islam has recently been contributed by See Hoon Peow, a Chinese Malaysian educator and scholar. In this rare example of a Buddhist input, See weighs in on how dialogue could be promoted between Buddhists and Muslims, arguing for its necessity in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia and for conflict resolution in southern Thailand. See emphasizes that Buddhism and Islam are fundamentally different in terms of doctrines and beliefs, regarding this difference as a potential cause of tension.[35] According to him, the categorical difference between Buddhism and Islam as non-theism and monotheism[36] leads to further differences in the meanings of seemingly similar practices, such as "prayers." They constitute a duty toward and communication with God in Islam while in Buddhism they are "[a] kind of meditation or the cleansing of [the] mind,"[37] The motivations for doing good and avoiding evil, central to both traditions, are also understood

32 K. Sri Dhammananda, "Let Peace Prevail on Earth," https://www.mitra.org.au/files/print/LET%20PEACE%20PREVAIL%20ON%20EARTH-1.pdf [accessed 26 June 2022]. Elsewhere, these are regarded as the teachings of "tolerance": K Sri Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, 4th ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia, 2002), 244.

33 K. Sri Dhammananda, "Why Religious Tolerance? Buddhist Tolerance," https://www.dhammatalks.net/Books6/Bhante_Dhammananda_Why_Religious_Tolerance.pdf [accessed 27 June 2022], 23.

34 Dhammananda, "Why Religious Tolerance?" 30.

35 See Hoon Peow, "Buddhism and Islam – Comparison and Dialogue," *Malaysian Journal on Human Rights* 2: 4 (July 2008), 60.

36 See, "Buddhism and Islam," 71. He does not view Buddhism as atheistic because "supernatural beings" exist in Buddhism, although they are accorded only "secondary importance": ibid., 68.

37 See, "Buddhism and Islam," 65–6.

differently.[38] In Islam, it is a "duty" of Muslims deriving from their "contract" with God, whereas in Buddhism it is for the enlightenment of individual practitioners.[39] Buddhism and Islam are further contrasted as "other-worldly" and "this[-]worldly" given that "it is the aim of Muslims to establish the Islamic ideals in this world, not in the hereafter," whereas Buddhists tend to "see this world as an illusion and try to find 'happiness' in nirvana."[40] The "social" nature of Islam manifests itself in the highly "engaging" attitude among its followers for the improvement of society, which is contrasted with the Buddhist stance of "non-engagement."[41]

To bridge such "apparent differences" for the realization of "healthy and fruitful dialogue,"[42] See suggests focusing on the importance of moderation emphasized in both Buddhism and Islam. According to him, the Buddhist notion of the Middle Way, which refers to the avoidance of extremes, finds its Islamic counterpart in the principle of "moderation and balance" emphasized in the Qur'an (2: 143), where the Muslim community is advised to be balanced, and admonished against wasteful/extravagant attitudes and spendthrifts alike.[43] Regarding this as a sufficient ground for dialogue between Buddhists and Muslims for the common goal of eliminating violent conflicts and realizing peace in the world, this Malaysian educator also points out what they can improve on in order to contribute to the process of establishing world peace. Buddhists need to develop "a social theory to make itself relevant to the contemporary issues," thereby learning to be more actively engaged in the betterment of society like Muslims are. Muslims, on their part, need to bring more to the fore "the principles of religious tolerance, moderation and balance in Islamic theology … so that the misunderstanding about Islam as [a] violent religion can be dispelled."[44] In what could be seen as indirect criticism of the conservative attitudes of some Muslims in Malaysia, See further suggests that Muslims should learn to be more flexible by following the "spirit or principle" of religious teachings, rather than the "form" or the "letter." Although he calls the "stubborn" attitude found among Muslims about interpreting the teachings of the Qur'an literally and wishing to follow them "admirable," See argues

38 This is significantly different from the way in which most Muslim writers comment on Buddhism by focusing on common ethical teachings: see below.

39 See, "Buddhism and Islam," 66. The "essentially individualistic" nature of "salvation" in Buddhism is contrasted with how in Islam salvation is to be realized on both individual and community levels: ibid., 68.

40 Ibid., 67.

41 Ibid., 64, 67.

42 Ibid., 59.

43 Ibid., 64, 69.

44 Ibid., 70.

that being more "accommodative" like Buddhists is essential "when living in a multi-religious society."[45] The author's reference to "one particular religion [set] as an official religion" and his insistence that "all these [issues] can be decided in a democratic way, as long as all parties are respected equally" may reflect the frustration that he has experienced as a member of a minority religion about the symbolic superiority granted to Islam and the less than equal treatment that non-Islamic traditions have received in Malaysia.[46]

See's wish to engage in dialogue with Muslims from a more "equal" standing is also clear from his refusal of conceptual frameworks based on Islamic doctrines employed to relate Buddhism and Islam. This manifests most strongly in his criticism of Alexander Berzin, who, in his pioneering effort to facilitate Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, has used such ideas as the People of the Book including Buddhists, and the Buddha being a prophet.[47] See takes exception to Berzin's appropriation of Islamic inclusivism, calling his interpretations "far-fetched." This is because "[the] Buddha has never considered himself a prophet and his teachings … are far different from the Islamic teachings [to be identified] as one of the 'Books of God' sent down to us by God through his Prophets."[48] Given the "non-theistic" nature of Buddhism and its categorical difference from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, See expresses stronger reservation toward Berzin's identification of Ādi Buddha as a creator God, regarding it as "even more contradictory to Buddhist teachings."[49] Thus refusing to accept the classical basis of Islamic inclusivism or resort to parallelism on the level of ultimate reality, See asserts that genuine dialogue should accompany "serious" comparison of Buddhist and Islamic doctrines without "fear" of possibly causing negative reactions.[50] In other words, Buddhists should not have to fit themselves within an Islamic worldview "to be accepted by Muslims to be equal dialogue partners."[51]

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45 Ibid., 66.

46 Ibid., 66–7.

47 In something of a defense of Berzin, one may say that he was using these Islamic concepts to test the ground for dialogue with Muslims, as it was the early days of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, although See's point that Buddhists should not have to fit around Islam is important in the actual contexts of socio-political dialogue and co-existence. For Berzin's approach, see below.

48 See, "Buddhism and Islam," 61.

49 Ibid., 61. See does not mention Berzin's parallelism between emptiness and the impersonal aspect of God, whose importance Berzin emphasizes in the Islamic understanding of God.

50 Ibid., 61.

51 Ibid., 69. See does not mention Yusuf's work, perhaps because it was not yet so well known in 2008 when the quoted article was published.

See's irritation at Berzin's stance points to the mismatch between a global dialogue undertaken in the comfort of a relatively neutral socio-political ground (or cyberspace) that references Southeast Asia, and the struggle of those operating within the reality of socio-political contestation in the region, which the former tends to bracket out.[52] While global positions may be resented for the insufficient attention they pay to the local attritions, they are at the same time certainly, and perhaps increasingly, becoming part of local arenas. See's stance also suggests that there is a new trend emerging among Malaysian Buddhists toward a more active expression of frustration at the ways in which Buddhism is treated less favorably compared with Islam. Apart from the perceived worsening treatment of non-Islamic traditions in Malaysia, the growing assertion of religious identity among Malaysian Buddhists may also explain the more active engagement with the discourse on religious diversity on the Buddhist side.

3 Muslim Writings in Malaysia

On the Muslim side, there has been a gradual but steady increase in the attention paid to the topic of Buddhism and Islam, including some comparative discussions. Written with the hope to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between Buddhists and Muslims in Malaysia, such contributions tend to emphasize the commonality of Buddhist and Islamic teachings in terms of ethics and morality. In a piece comparing Buddhism and Islam, Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, a scholar of Islam and comparative religion based at the IIUM, regards the two traditions as fundamentally different in terms of "faith items," despite having striking similarities on the levels of ethics and morality.[53] The primary difference derives from Buddhism not believing in "God, … divinity, … spiritual existences, … and not even in the existence of the soul." Noting that Buddhist rituals are centered around the "training towards purifying and

52 As will be seen below, Berzin is more concerned with giving voice to Muslims in his dialogue initiatives.

53 Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism," in her *Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The Muhibah Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2010), 191–208 [henceforth referred to as Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2010)], see 193. This is a revised version of Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (written 23 June 2006, posted 5 December 2010) International Network of Engaged Buddhists https://www.inebnetwork.org/explaining-islam-and-buddhism-by-kamar-oniah-kamaruzaman [accessed 2 April 2022, henceforth referred to as Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2006)].

upgrading the self" rather than "worshipping of God" as in Islam, she further states that "Islam is faith-centered while Buddhism is spirituality-centered."[54] The God-no-God distinction is particularly clear when she says: "there is none to worship [in Buddhism]" as "the Buddhas are not regarded as God and divinity is never attached to them and nor also to other beings."[55] She paraphrases this with rather simple summaries of Muslim and Buddhist religiosities, saying, "while the focus of Islam is God the Divine Creator, the focus of Buddhism is the Buddha the Teacher and Guide."[56] All this leads her to conclude: "Buddhism … is basically an atheistic religion" whereas "Islam is a very strict monotheism."[57]

With her heavy reliance on Christian-based terms, such as "God," or "soul," Kamaruzaman's description of Islam risks over-simplifying it and making Buddhism and Islam appear categorically different. For example, Islam has developed a more nuanced understanding of ultimate reality, notably through Sufi traditions, where divine qualities can be not only impersonal but also immanent. Her tendency to downplay the fluid and flexible nature of Islam is also found in another significant difference she points out in terms of the position of scriptures. According to her, Islam is "scripture-centered" as the Qur'an and the Hadith are referred to by Muslims "in reference to every aspect of life," while Buddhism is "scripture-guided" as the Buddhist scriptures, although they are also authoritative, "do not set up the rules on worldly matters."[58] Here, Kamaruzaman alludes to the basic similarity between the authoritative texts in Islam and Buddhism by calling both "scriptures." In adopting the concept of scripture, which is derived from Western understandings of Christianity, however, her observation is misleading, because the "scripture" in Islam can lead (and has led) to widely, and even wildly, different inferences on what is commanded by God. Given the highly organic process in which its teachings are interpreted, Islam may be described more as "scripture-guided" (the label she gives to Buddhism) or even 'scripture-inspired.' The rather rigid presentation of Islam, whether the conception of God or the position of its "scripture," as if the interpretations of its teachings were fixed and non-negotiable, may be attributable to the limited recognition that the Malaysian government grants

54 Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2010), 194.

55 Ibid., 194, 196.

56 Although she notes the great diversity of beliefs found within Buddhism, Kamaruzaman does not take into account what may be regarded as the 'divinization' of the Buddha in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In mentioning "the Pure Land Sect," for example, she does not even discuss the position of Buddha Amitābha in Pure Land traditions nor explore the potentially 'theistic' (or 'monotheistic') aspect of its religiosity: ibid., 194.

57 Ibid., 195, 197.

58 Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2006).

to diversity within Islam, as well as the state-led censorship on how interreligious dialogues should be conducted, which we discussed in the previous chapter. Kamaruzaman's example suggests that the more public dialogue is, the less one is inclined to make use of the various interpretive tools available within one's own tradition, which would allow one to stop regarding those concepts in their most reified form, as an obstacle to the potential deepening of dialogue.

On the other hand, Kamaruzaman is more willing to recognize a commonality between Buddhist and Islamic "code[s] of morality," in that they both emphasize the importance of human accountability for their actions, which determine their practitioners' "position and status in the next life."[59] She further emphasizes that what constitutes good and bad behavior, and what is good and bad in terms of values more generally, are similar in the two traditions, and indeed common across all religious communities. She attributes this to the fact that "as human beings, we function the same way" regardless of religious beliefs. According to her, all religions teach how to overcome the "Seven Deadly Sins [of] pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth," and admonish against the "mortal sins" of "murder, adultery, stealing, lying, among others." Pointing out that the latter are covered by the *ḥudūd* rules in Islam and the Ten Precepts in Buddhism, she notes a further commonality (also shared by Sikhism), namely, the prohibition of consuming intoxicants.[60] Such realization of the fundamental commonality between Buddhists and Muslims as human beings could revise the contrast she made between their attitudes to their respective scriptures.

In her comparative discussion, Kamaruzaman regards it as crucial to highlight differences, alongside similarities, between religions. This is primarily because misunderstandings tend to develop over differences, which may then escalate into "unpleasant troubles."[61] For her, the differences "at the theological, scriptural, doctrinal and ritual levels … are fundamental, un-negotiable and irreconcilable." Holding that each religion defines itself in its own specific

59 Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2010), 205.

60 Ibid., 205–6; Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2006). The Ten Precepts are the set of training rules typically taken up by novice monks in Theravāda Buddhism. However, it would have sufficed here to refer to the Five Precepts, as they admonish against all the major "moral sins" mentioned. See below for more on the Five Precepts. She elaborates on the commonality of ethical teachings of different religions in Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, "Pluralistic Unity Based on Parallel Religious Ethics," in her *Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The Muhibah Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2010), 75–99.

61 Kamaruzaman's arguments quoted in this paragraph are all from Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2006).

ways, she is highly critical of those who "judge and gauge other [religions] though their own belief systems and value standards." According to her, such a stance "does not only reflect ignorance and arrogance" of the person but also contradicts the message of their own tradition as "all religions pay due respect to other people."[62] Being thus committed to recognizing the particularities of each religion "in the context of pluralistic living, and … of interfaith dialogue and engagements," Kamaruzaman has strong reservations about pluralist views. Observing that the "truth" is defined variably by different religions, she asserts: "we are not going toward the same destination; we each choose to go elsewhere; therefore it is not about transportation, but about destinations." While conceding that some religions do acknowledge the validity and truth of all religions, she holds that most religions do not, "particularly monotheistic religions." However, this does not lead directly to a dismissal of other religions. Differentiating religious plurality and religious pluralism, she claims that monotheistic religions do acknowledge the co-existence of various religions and encourage mutual respect. What they do not recognize, according to her, is religious pluralism, the "identification of [different] truth-claims."

Despite her emphasis on fundamental differences between Buddhism and Islam as an "atheism" and "a very strict monotheism," Kamaruzaman's view can be categorized as parallelist, primarily given the substantial parallels she recognizes between Buddhist and Islamic teachings on ideal conduct and its importance for the next life. It is along these "touch-points" found on the level of ethics, and the notions of "universal humanistic values and social responsibilities" in particular, "that Muslims and Buddhists can work together for peace and a harmonious pluralistic living."[63] Moreover, in delineating how the commonality of ethico-moral teachings across religions is rooted in the "concept of a common family-hood of humanity" upheld by all religions, this Malay Muslim scholar brings in a further, and more fundamental, token of parallelism, namely the idea found in all religions that all things share one common source. According to her, "all religions trace the beginning of humanity and everything else to one single Source, either God or some other mythical sources."[64] Although she does not specify what this source is in Buddhism, her observation points to possible parallels between Buddhism and Islam on the level of ultimate reality. This level has the potential to provide a more substantial theological foundation for the parallelism she has found on the level of ethics. It would also deflect the focus of comparison from the emphasis currently

62 This can be understood as an indirect criticism of inclusivist approaches.

63 Kamaruzaman, "Explaining Islam and Buddhism" (2006).

64 Ibid.

placed on the categorical difference between monotheistic Islam and atheistic Buddhism, and open up the possibility of viewing ultimate reality as diversely manifested and understood in both Buddhism and Islam, allowing the supposed difference to appear less stark.

The similarities found between Buddhism and Islam in terms of "moral practices" are also highlighted by Nur Suriya Mohd Nor, another Malay Muslim scholar of religion based at the IIUM.[65] While noting the presence of "major doctrinal differences" between the two traditions, Nor does not elaborate on them but focuses instead on discussing the moral teachings common to Buddhism and Islam, pointing out, for example, Islamic equivalents for major Buddhist teachings such as the Five Precepts.[66] She also highlights the centrality of compassion for social harmony in the messages of both Buddhism and Islam, affirming the teachings of the Sigalovada Sutta on ideal family and social relationships from an Islamic perspective.[67] These comparative reflections lead her to argue that the Buddhist concepts of compassion and loving-kindness, reflected in abstaining from harming all living beings, finds its equivalent in the Islamic virtue of love, directed toward both human and non-human beings.[68] While more systematic, and perhaps deeper, theological exploration could be awaited on these parallels, Nor's engagement with the topic of Buddhism and Islam is notable in two major ways. First, she is among the very few Malay Muslim scholars in Malaysia who claim to have a research focus on Buddhism.[69] Rather than simply commenting on Buddhist teachings from an Islamic perspective, as many Muslim writers do, she conducts research on Buddhism per se. Secondly, in studying Buddhism and its relevance to Islam, she pays particular attention to Buddhist communities in Malaysia, researching the activities of ethnic Chinese Buddhists.[70] Her awareness of developments within the local Buddhist communities is also gleaned

65 Nur Suriya Mohd Nor, "Islam and Buddhism: Similarities of Moral Practices," *AL-ITQĀN* 3: 2 (2019), 23.

66 Ibid., 27–30. The Five Precepts are the basic set of training rules that Buddhist practitioners are encouraged to take up to develop a wholesome lifestyle. They consist of abstaining from killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants.

67 The Sigalovada Sutta is a major source of guidance on lay life in Theravāda Buddhism.

68 Ibid., 30–39.

69 IIUM, "Staff Directory: Nur Suriya Binti Mohd Nor (Dr.)" https://www.iium.edu.my/directory/show/7233 [accessed 6 April 2022].

70 See, for example, Nur Suriya binti Mohd Nor, "The Chinese Mahayana Buddhist Community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor," *AL-ITQĀN* 2: 2 (2018), 57–80. She has also drawn parallels between Islam and Confucianism. Nur Suriya binti Mohd Nor, "*Fiṭrah* in Islam and *Ren Xing* in Confucianism: Their Relation to Islamic and Confucian Ethics," *AL-ITQĀN* Special Issue 1 (2018), 17–27.

from the way she quotes the work of K. Sri Dhammananda. With her constant interest in Buddhism and inter-religious relations within the domestic arena, Nor can be said to represent a new approach toward the topic of Buddhism and Islam emerging among younger generations of Malay Muslim scholars in Malaysia.[71]

4 Leading Voice of Parallelism in Southeast Asia: Imtiyaz Yusuf

The most extensive theological reflection on Buddhism and Islam, in both Thai and Malaysian contexts, comes from Imtiyaz Yusuf, one of the most prominent figures in Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Southeast Asia. Hailing from an Indian Muslim family in Tanzania, he has a career spanning more than three decades in the region, first in Thailand and then in Malaysia, as a scholar of Religious Studies and Islam. Yusuf employs an ostensibly parallelist approach,[72] regarding parallels between Buddhist and Islamic concepts as "tools" for "empathetic understanding and dialogue," especially in "this critical time" of continuing communal conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia.[73] Many of the parallels he points out are drawn between the historical Buddha and Prophet Muhammad, or more generally, the concepts of

71 The appearance of various articles on Buddhism and Islam, both of comparative analysis and on Buddhist-Muslim relations, in academic journals published in Malaysia, e.g., *AL-ITQĀN* published through the IIUM press, also attests to this emerging trend. Furthermore, exploration of alternative doctrinal tools for accommodating other religions has also been undertaken, for example through the Malay concept of *muhibah*, which corresponds to Arabic *maḥabba*, love, but is used with slightly different meanings. This line of exploration has been undertaken particularly actively by scholars affiliated with the IIUM. Sari Hanafi, "From Streamlining to Mainstreaming 'Islamization of Knowledge': The Case of the International Islamic University of Malaysia," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 38: 1–2 (2021), 110, 120–21; Haslina Ibrahim, Mariam Adawiah Dzulkifli, Rohaiza Rokis, and Wan Nurhasniah Wan Husin, "*Muhibah* and Religious Pluralism: Maintaining Religious Harmony in Malaysia," in *Religion, Culture, Society: Readings in the Humanities and Revealed Knowledge*, eds. Mohammad A. Quayum and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim (Kuala Lumpur: Silverfish Books, 2017), 112–38; Haslina Ibrahim, Rohaiza Abd. Rokis, and Wan Nurhasniah Wan Husin, "Muhibah is Not Religious Pluralism: The Understanding of Religious Coexistence among Religious Leaders in Malaysia," *TAFHIM* 9 (2016), 67–85; Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The Muhibah Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2010).

72 Obuse, "Theology of Religions," 83–4.

73 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts of *Tathagata* and *Nur Muhammadi*," *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 5 (2005) 103–4; Yusuf, "Building Muslim-Buddhist Understanding," 174, 186.

Buddha and prophet,[74] although, as will be seen later, he has recently started to explore forms of parallelism between Buddhist and Muslim conceptions of ultimate reality. Yusuf regards both the Buddha and Prophet Muhammad as "model religious leaders"[75] who taught "what is the true state of being and how the illusions which drag humanity through darkness and injustice can be overcome."[76] He recognizes "an analogical compatibility" between the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* (suffering, un-satisfactoriness of life) and the Qur'anic concept of *kabad* (toil, hardship, struggle), which may be eased through *mettā-karuṇā* (loving-kindness and compassion) and *raḥmah* (mercy) respectively.[77] Yusuf's Buddha-Prophet parallelism, which is based on their religious experience, i.e., *nirvāṇa*-enlightenment for the Buddha and *wahy* (revelation) for Muhammad,[78] often invokes concepts commonly associated with Sufi traditions and Mahāyāna Buddhism. In one variation the Sufi notion of *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect human being) is described as "act[ing] in life in accordance with the precepts of the moral divine will free from all attachment to the results … [w]ith a heart full of love, kindness and compassion toward … every being … in a selfless spirit," which makes the person "a moral guide worthy of emulation."[79] "This spiritually enlightened and morally active concept of human being" is viewed as having "compatibility" with the Buddhist idea of *bodhisattva*, who in their compassionate act of altruism remains in the world of *saṃsāra* to help other beings, although the *bodhisattva* is enlightened and ready to leave this world.[80] In another parallelist reflection, the Buddhist notion of *tathāgata* (literally meaning one who has thus gone, i.e., Buddha), whose quality, or "the essence of enlightenment," is immanent in all beings as

74 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islamic Theology of Religious Pluralism: Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," in *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts – Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges*, ed. Mohammed Hashas (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 215.

75 Yusuf, "*Tathagata* and *Nur Muhammadi*," 108.

76 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts *Ummatan Wasaṭan* (The Middle Nation) and *Majjhima Patipada* (The Middle Way)," *Islamic Studies* 48: 3 (2009), 367.

77 Yusuf, "*Ummatan Wasaṭan* and *Majjhima Patipada*," 377–8; Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islam and Buddhism," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, UK and Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 364, 366; Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 215.

78 Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 214.

79 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Dialogue between Sufism and Buddhism: The Concepts of *al-Insan al-Kamil* and *Bodhisattva*," in *Measuring the Effect of Iranian Mysticism on Southeast Asia: Presentations of International Seminar*, ed. Imtiyaz Yusuf (Bangkok: Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Bangkok, 2004), 215.

80 Ibid., 215–6. See also Yusuf, "Islam and Buddhism," 367–9.

the Buddha nature, is juxtaposed with the Sufi notion of *nūr muḥammadi* (the light of Muhammad), the primordial quality of spiritual perfection innate in all human beings, which enables them to achieve union with God.[81]

The parallelism between these two paradigmatic perfect beings is further explored through the ideal way of living and state of mind in Buddhism and Islam which they embody. For example, Yusuf draws on the Buddhist axiom of the Middle Way (Pali. *majjhimā paṭipadā*) and the Islamic notion of *ummah wasaṭ* (the middle nation, mentioned in Qur'an 2: 143) or the concept of *wasaṭiyyah* (moderation), and encourages Buddhists and Muslims to be more socially engaged and develop moderate and accommodating attitudes toward one another.[82] Focusing on the importance of breath and breathing in the two traditions, he further finds commonality between the (Theravāda) Buddhist practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* (mindfulness of breathing) and the Islamic focus on *taqwā* (God-awareness, or being mindful of God whose breath, *rūḥ*, is the primary source of life and death), through which one can achieve deliverance from all afflictions, living the life of *wasaṭiyyah*.[83]

In addition to the above-mentioned concepts in Buddhism and Islam which pertain to ideal human beings of the highest spiritual rank, Yusuf has also been exploring direct parallels between Buddhism and Islam on the level of the ultimate truth, starting around 2013.[84] He observes that a "broader and more flexible concept of ultimate reality," which can be "interpreted as personal or non-personal," will allow for a dialogue between the Islamic concept of *tawḥīd* and the Buddhist concept of Dhamma.[85] Pointing out that the ultimate truth is conceived as non-personal, formless, and eternal in both Buddhism and Islam, Yusuf regards the Dharma and God as the same in the sense that "[t]he Dharma is God for [Buddhists], just [as] Allah is for Muslims."[86] This suggests that the Dharma and God are regarded as functional equivalents.

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81 Yusuf, "*Tathagata* and *Nur Muhammadi*," 109–11.

82 Yusuf, "*Ummatan Wasaṭan* and *Majjhima Patipada*," 369, 379–93; Yusuf, "Building Muslim-Buddhist Understanding," 174.

83 Yusuf, "Building Muslim-Buddhist Understanding," see esp. 184.

84 He may have been inspired by Shah-Kazemi's 2010 work, in which the Dharma/Buddha is viewed as corresponding to various aspects of God as it is understood in Islam. For Shah-Kazemi's view, see below.

85 Yusuf, "Islam and Buddhism," 366. He follows John Hick in highlighting the distinction between personal and impersonal conceptions of ultimate reality. Yusuf, "*Ummatan Wasaṭan* and *Majjhima Patipada*," 372–3.

86 Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (Gadjah Mada University), "CRCS UGM's Interview with Prof. Imtiyaz Yusuf" (26 June 2017) https://crcs.ugm.ac.id/muslims-dont-study-buddhism-enough-an-interview-with-prof-imtiyaz-yusuf-part-1 [accessed 28 March 2022].

The difficulty in seeing similarities between them arises, according to Yusuf, because "Muslims think of Allah as a person."[87] The focus on the non-personal aspect of God has also allowed Yusuf to regard the Buddhist notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), an encounter with ultimate reality "from within," as being close to the Abrahamic religious notion of transcendental monotheism, and to recognize "philosophical compatibility between theistic and non-theistic views of Ultimate Reality."[88] Here, Yusuf's attention to the non-personal aspect of God allows him to open new ground for parallelism between Buddhism and Islam. Although similarly working with the distinctions between (mono)theism and non-theism, Yusuf can go much further in exploring new ground for parallelism between Buddhism and Islam than Kamaruzaman, who seems to stick to a highly personalized, rather Western/Christian notion of God.

Yusuf also mentions inclusivist and pluralist ideas in his writings, while generally keeping them in the background when engaging in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue or discussing possible directions it can and should take. He usually refers to inclusivist views proposed by major Muslim scholars, both historical and contemporary, in surveying Muslim attitudes to Buddhism, for two major reasons. The first is to demonstrate that Muslims have positively accepted Buddhism across history, and that they have coexisted peacefully with Buddhists, especially in Southeast Asia. This is grounded in his hope of "reviving" the Buddhist-Muslim dialogue and even a sense of symbiosis between the two communities, which were interrupted by the "Western coloniali[sm] and the subsequent surge of Asian and African nationalistic sentiments."[89] To that end, he also advocates the need to "urgent[ly] address" the "non-critical acceptance of legends" or "nationalist-religious mytheologised notions" of major historical issues that have hindered dialogue and mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims, notably "the supposed destruction of … Nalanda [monastery]" by Muslims and "the Buddhist persecution of the Patani Muslims" following the Siamese annexation of the "kingdom of Patani in

87 Ibid.

88 Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 213. The experience of *fanā'* emphasized in Sufi practice and that of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) realized through the Buddhist experience of enlightenment are also regarded as compatible. Imtiyaz Yusuf, "A Muslim's Reflections on *Saddharmapundariksutra* – The Lotus Sutra," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 40 (2020), 88.

89 Yusuf, "*Ummatan Wasaṭan* and *Majjhima Patipada*," 369. This observation points to the possibility that the rigid notions of God, like the one employed by Kamaruzaman, may have been influenced by post-colonial forms of nationalism.

1909."[90] The second motive behind Yusuf's reference to inclusivist views, such as al-Shahrastānī's identification of the Buddha with the Qur'anic figure of al-Khiḍr and Muhammad Hamidullah's theories surrounding Qur'anic references to the Buddha (see Chapter 1), is to edify his fellow Muslims in Thailand, who, according to him, tend to regard Buddhism as *kufr* (unbelief in God) and *shirk* (polytheism) due to their overly literal understanding of the Qur'an.[91] Thus it is possible to say that Yusuf's use of inclusivism is limited to intra-Muslim dialogue, vis-à-vis his fellow Muslims in Thailand and in Southeast Asia at large. According to him, it is "ASEAN Muslims" who, by equipping themselves with the correct understanding of history and a more flexible theological stance, "need to take [the] initiative" in engaging with Buddhists, rather than waiting for external interventions from their fellow Muslims from the Middle East, who "have no … experience of engaging with Buddhism."[92]

In many of his writings geared toward Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, Yusuf is careful not to be taken as developing an inclusivist agenda, or as "attempt[ing] to Buddhicize Islam or Islamize Buddhism."[93] His growing commitment to parallelism is particularly notable in his treatment of the Islamic concept of universal prophethood, which he presents as comparable to the concept of Buddhahood, rather than using it as a basis for suggesting that the historical Buddha be regarded as a Muslim prophet.[94] Such a clear nod to parallelism away from inclusivism must be at least partially attributable to his awareness that inclusivist views do not go down well in dialogue with Buddhists, as seen in the previous chapter, and, more generally, to the sensitivity to the dynamics of Buddhist-Muslim relations he developed through living as a Muslim in the Buddhist majority society of Thailand and his commitment to enhancing communal relationships with Buddhists (even by going against the grain of the reasoning of some of his fellow Muslims at times).

Yusuf has also expressed views that can be regarded as pluralist, yet only within the context of interpreting Qur'anic teachings on religious diversity. Here again, his primary aim is to urge his fellow Muslims to view their religious others, primarily Buddhists, in a more accommodating way, that is, by

90 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Muslim-Buddhist Relations Caught between Nalanda and Pattani," in *Ethnicity and Conflict in Buddhist Societies in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. K. M. de Silva (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2015), 157, 162.

91 Yusuf, "Faces of Islam," 7–8, 22; Yusuf, "*Ummatan Wasaṭan* and *Majjhima Patipada*," 374–9. More generally, he encourages Muslims to learn more about Buddhism. Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, "Interview with Prof. Imtiyaz Yusuf."

92 Yusuf, "Muslim-Buddhist Relations," 193.

93 Yusuf, "*Tathagata* and *Nur Muhammadi*," 108.

94 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islam and Buddhism," 364.

recognizing that "the religious truth is available through the teachings of different religions," or, put more simply, that "all religions are true … and equal."[95] He argues that "everyone who believes in Ultimate Reality [i.e., a *muslim* in a non-institutional sense] and does good, is guaranteed salvation."[96] While he regards "Allah and other definitions of Ultimate Reality [as] identical,"[97] the spirit of religious pluralism expounded by Yusuf is more inclusivist than pluralist in a strict sense, in that the recognition of non-Islamic traditions is based on specifically Islamic ideas such as the universality of prophethood, all human beings possessing *dīn al-fitrah* (the innate tendency to surrender to ultimate reality), and the category of *ahl al-kitāb*, which he interprets as referring also to non-Abrahamic religions.[98] According to Yusuf, the perspective of pluralism "aims at peaceful coexistence between religions and promotes the recognition that religious diversity is a boon and not a bane for humanity."[99] As such, it is the only way forward for Muslims living in Thailand, if they are to live peacefully and constructively with their religious others, such as Buddhist and Christians. With a sense of urgency, he warns: "Thus if a Muslim minority such as that in Thailand prefers to adopt an exclusivist and narrow interpretation of the universal message of the Qur'an it will lead to its own peril."[100] By abandoning "insularism and negative attitudes towards other religious communities" and adopting more pluralistic interpretations of their scripture, Yusuf argues, Thai Muslims will also help prevent Islamophobia from growing among non-Muslims.[101] The importance of showcasing the pluralistic nature of Islamic teachings to Buddhists is emphasized further in one of his most recent interventions, where he refers to a new context which he calls "the age of Asian Islamophobia and Muslim-Buddhist conflicts in Asia."[102]

The reason why Yusuf does not present his view of "religious pluralism" discussed earlier in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue may be attributed to his awareness of its potentially inclusivist, therefore imposing, implications, which

95 Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islamic Theology of Religious Pluralism: Qur'an's Attitude Towards Other Religions," *Prajñā Vīhāra* 11: 1 (2010), 124, 129; Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 202; Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Religious Diversity in a Buddhist Majority Country: The Case of Islam in Thailand," *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 3 (2003), 132, 135.

96 Yusuf, "Qur'an's Attitude," 132; Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 203.

97 Yusuf, "Qur'an's Attitude," 133; Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 208.

98 Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 202–3, 205.

99 Yusuf, "Qur'an's Attitude," 124.

100 Ibid., 139.

101 Ibid., 126–7.

102 Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding," 201; see also 217–8.

might offend his Buddhist interlocutors. It is also possible that he takes care not to create conflict with other Muslims who may object to his interpretations, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia, where religious pluralism has been discouraged. For example, when asked if he was a pluralist after giving a talk in Indonesia in 2017, he responded by saying he was a parallelist.[103] In an interview conducted with a Buddhist organization in Singapore in 2021, on the other hand, Yusuf opted for the term inclusivist: "Islam is an inclusive religion. I may call it pluralistic, but people don't like the word pluralism because of all the misunderstandings of the word pluralism going on here in the Muslim discourse, so I would say Islam is a very inclusivist religion."[104] Most recently, he actively presented himself as a parallelist, denying being a pluralist or perennialist.[105] These episodes clearly show his awareness of the 'bad press' that the idea of religious pluralism (including perennialism) has earned in the region. Yusuf's decision to opt for the label 'parallelist' is at least partially motivated by the socio-political need to stay within the accepted theological parameters so that he can continue to discuss views that accommodate other religions in public.

However, Yusuf's increasing appropriation of parallelism is not solely the outcome of socio-political pragmatism.[106] Rather, it is out of his recognition of the limitations that accompany the alternative approaches, a conclusion he reached through years of "struggle" in promoting dialogue between Buddhists and Muslims on a deeper level.[107] Observing that Muslims (and monotheists in general) are "obsessed with finding God in every religion," he emphasizes the importance of not trying to look for the same things because such attitudes would only lead to a "deadlock" in dialogue.[108] In what may sound like a

103 Personal communication with Imtiyaz Yusuf at the second event of the trialogue "Shin Buddhism, Christianity, Islam: Conversations in Comparative Theology," held at Münster University, 12–14 July, 2017. He has adopted the term from my work discussing his view, and subsequently developed his own definition of it. See below.

104 Institute of Chinese Buddhism, "Buddhism in Southeast Asia" (Interview with Imtiyaz Yusuf), ICBuddhism Podcast Episode 8 (July 2021), https://open.spotify.com/episode/3JgYbAHvoasDhqlEpKk6Gf?fbclid=IwAR3ttoLyyeuasLFYh8aJmeyk6t8nsDa05CVAMG16gPohmSJovYCg00V2Pn8 [accessed 29 March 2022].

105 Yusuf, "A Muslim's Reflections," 79, 81; Yusuf, "Building Muslim-Buddhist Understanding," 174.

106 Yusuf has been increasingly using the terms "parallel" and "parallelism" in his recent writings. See Yusuf, "A Muslim's Reflections" and Yusuf, "Building Islam-Buddhism Understanding."

107 Institute of Chinese Buddhism, "Buddhism in Southeast Asia."

108 Ibid. In other words, his goal is not to "[look] for Buddhism in Islam, nor Islam in Buddhism." Yusuf, "A Muslim's Reflections," 92.

manifesto against inclusivism and pluralism, he says: "I seek to learn and understand the parallels between religions without replacing or substituting [one tradition with the other]," as "religious parallels [are] unique in themselves."[109] Thus, parallels for him do not mean "agreement" between the two religions, but "concordance" or "compatibility"; they are "in harmony" with each other.[110] His commitment to parallelism comes out perhaps most forcefully when he emphasizes the technical definition of the very term parallel, that is, "parallels never meet."[111] According to him, religions are "parallel lines that do not meet except at a meeting station/platform and separate again after being enriched [by the encounter], progressing toward the next station."[112] The way in which Yusuf refrains from pursuing the question of sameness, or agreement, is characteristic of parallelist approaches that distinguish them from pluralist ones; whether or not there is ultimate convergence between traditions beyond these parallels is not of utmost concern. The goal of such approaches is to present parallels that facilitate dialogue and reflection, on the basis of which the audience can decide and act for themselves, if they wish.

As seen in the example of Yusuf, the choice of parallelism is a conscious process of combined socio-political and theological negotiation, geared toward the goal of promoting mutual understanding and dialogue. In developing his parallelism, Yusuf has been responding to the changing situations surrounding Buddhist-Muslim relations in such countries as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. On the socio-political level, Yusuf's decision to opt for parallelism between Buddhism and Islam may be attributed to the resistance among Thai Buddhists against inclusivist views (such as that which regards the Buddha as a prophet), or, more generally, his concern not to offend the religious majority, i.e., Buddhists. In Muslim majority societies such as Malaysia and Indonesia, by contrast, he has been more concerned not to upset Muslims (or make them suspicious) with his pluralistic approaches. Theologically speaking, Yusuf initially restricted his focus on the Buddha-Prophet parallelism due to potential concerns for incurring *shirk* by comparing God to something else, but came to draw parallels between Buddhist and Islamic ideas of ultimate reality through shifting the focus from the God-no-God distinction to personal/non-personal conceptions of ultimate reality. This change of perspective is the backbone of John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, with which Yusuf must be thoroughly

109 Ibid., 81.
110 Ibid., 88, 91–2, 100.
111 Yusuf, "Building Muslim-Buddhist Understanding," 174.
112 Yusuf, "A Muslim's Reflections," 81.

familiar.[113] Given the recent timing of when Yusuf seems to have made his shift, however, it is more likely to derive from the deepening of his understanding of Buddhism, especially through his increased familiarity with Mahāyāna Buddhism, as well as the development of the global discourse on Buddhist-Muslim mutual reflections, notably through the appearance of a more direct parallelism between God and the Dharma proposed in Shah-Kazemi's work (see below).

As will also be seen in other examples of parallelism, Yusuf employs parallelist views along with other stances, such as inclusivism and pluralism. Such 'theological fluidity' observed in the form of combination of, or oscillation between, different approaches is part and parcel of parallelism (and as such it epitomizes its open and 'negotiating' attitude), as it emerges where active engagement with diverse social and theological contexts and flexibility of stances are often required. Yusuf's example amply shows that the urgent need for inter-religious dialogue created by the socio-political contestation between the majority and first minority religions in Thailand and Malaysia (as well as the suspicion toward pluralism among the Muslim majority in Indonesia) has led to the active use of parallelist approaches. It is precisely the specific dynamics of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Southeast Asia that have made explicit the multi-level complexity that accompanies and feeds parallelism, and its further, unexplored potential in navigating sensitive situations surrounding inter-religious relations (and advancing the discussion on religious diversity in a more open-ended way worldwide).

5 Parallelism Employed Outside Southeast Asia

The reality and dynamism of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Southeast Asia that are behind the newly emerging trend of parallelism have also encouraged the use of parallelist approaches among scholars based outside the region. In what follows I examine how the parallelist stances found in the works of Alexander Berzin and Reza Shah-Kazemi have been inspired partly by their contact with Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, respectively. Although they are not directly involved in the process of domestic dialogue initiatives in Southeast Asia, their work is read by, and elicits responses from, those from the region who are interested in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, thereby becoming part of the process in which a Buddhist-Muslim public discourse

113 Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 246f.

develops and contributes to the production of new knowledge on the topic in the region.

5.1 *Pioneer of Buddhist Parallelism: Alexander Berzin*

Alexander Berzin (1944-), a Tibetan Buddhist teacher with a Jewish background from the USA, is one of the most active Buddhist figures in contemporary Buddhist-Muslim engagements.[114] Berzin has undertaken dialogues with Muslims since 1994 in various places, ranging from African countries such as Mauritius and Zanzibar to Middle Eastern countries like Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, to Indonesia.[115] Berzin's approach to Buddhist-Muslim dialogue is characterized by his willingness to adopt ideas conducive to fostering peaceful relations between the two religions. For example, he strongly disagrees with the view that the *Kālacakra Tantra* 'demonizes' Islam. Noting that history is always subject to interpretations, he argues that if there are positive and negative interpretations of an event or a writing, it is one's ethical responsibility to go for the positive.[116]

Berzin's commitment to opt for an interpretation that is more likely to generate peaceful outcomes is amply reflected in the parallelist way in which he keenly explores potential points of doctrinal connection between Buddhism and Islam.[117] The most significant is his treatment of the subject of God, which has long been regarded as a stumbling block in Buddhist-Muslim relations and dialogue; Muslims have found the putative absence of God in Buddhism problematic, while Buddhists have virtually never attempted to compare and relate Buddhism and Islam in terms of the ultimate truth. Berzin challenges these traditional attitudes by regarding Ādi Buddha as a creator God in Buddhism,

114 He has also advised the Dalai Lama on Buddhist-Jewish dialogue. Alexander Berzin, "Tibetan Buddhist-Jewish Dialogue," Study Buddhism https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/interreligious-dialogue/tibetan-buddhist-jewish-dialogue; Nathan Katz, "A Meeting of Ancient Peoples: Western Jews and the Dalai Lama of Tibet," Jerusalem Letters of Lasting Interest VP:113 (1 March 1991) <https://www.jcpa.org/jl/hit20.htm> [both accessed 5 February 2024].

115 Alexander Berzin, "Islamic-Buddhist Dialogue," Study Buddhism https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/buddhism-islam/islamic-buddhist-dialogue [accessed 17 August 2022] Through accompanying and translating for the Dalai Lama on a number of occasions, Berzin may also have influenced his appreciation of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue.

116 Personal communication with Alexander Berzin at the conference "Islam and Tibet: Cultural Interactions," held at the Warburg Institute, London, 16–19 November 2006.

117 On the other hand, he is highly cautious about resorting to mysticism in bridging the two traditions, as it facilitates mutual understanding "only to a limited extent." Berzin, "Response to Majid Tehranian," 259.

or as a Buddhist counterpart to the Islamic concept of God. According to him, Ādi Buddha is "clear light primordial consciousness," which creates "all appearances of samsara and nirvana."[118] This, he argues, concurs with the Islamic view that God is "not a person but … an abstract creating principle." Berzin can thus conclude: "Buddhism does accept a creator God but with its own unique interpretation."[119]

What is particularly remarkable about Berzin's approach is his attentiveness to the importance that Muslims attach to the question of God. While being clear that "Buddha is not an omnipotent God," he regards the commonly referenced theism-non-theism divide as a highly sensitive matter. He advocates it being best to avoid mentioning this divide directly to Muslims when in dialogue, since "that would lead to the instant closing of the door." Instead, he takes up the potential Muslim understanding that God is "nothingness": "Buddhism has certain aspects that you could ascribe to Allah, or in general God, but doesn't put them all together under one term." In further acknowledging the Islamic conception of God, Berzin holds that Ādi Buddha being "beyond words, beyond concepts, unimaginable" is something Muslims could easily relate to, "because in Islam, Allah is not personified."[120]

What is notable here is that Berzin came to be convinced of the possible usefulness of the aforementioned concept of Ādi Buddha as the Buddhist equivalent of God through his discussions with Indonesian Buddhists, whom he met during his lecture tour in Indonesia in 1988.[121] Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country with the biggest Muslim population in the world, has a very small and rather divided Buddhist population. The country's Pancasila (five principles) policy, set forth in the 1945 constitution,[122] puts forward belief in one God as a central tenet of nation-building, on which basis it gives official

118 Ibid. Elsewhere he describes Ādi Buddha as "the creator of our appearances, what we perceive." Snjezana Akpinar and Alexander Berzin, "Interview with Snjezana Akpinar and Alex Berzin," *Inquiring Mind* https://www.inquiringmind.com/article/2001_12_interview_dharma-of-islam [accessed 17 August 2022].

119 Pointing out that "[m]any Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu thinkers assert that God is abstract and present in all beings," he regards this idea as epitomized in the Islamic description of God having many names. Berzin, "Islamic-Buddhist Dialogue."

120 Akpinar and Berzin, "Interview."

121 Ibid.; Berzin, "Islamic-Buddhist Dialogue."

122 The attack on Buddhist temples, including Borobudur in 1985 by some extremists Muslims (a rare case of Buddhist-Muslim relations entailing violence in contemporary Indonesia) was a reaction to the neglect of Islamic identity in the Pancasila, rather than an expression of hostility toward Buddhists. For more on the Pancasila ideology, see Karel Steenbrink, "Indonesian Politics and a Muslim Theology of Religions," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 4: 2 (1993), 221f.

recognition to major religious traditions in the country.[123] The basis of official recognition is for the religion in question to have One Supreme God, Prophets, and Holy Scriptures. To meet these requirements, some Indonesian Buddhists, notably those from the indigenous Buddhayāna school, have put forward Ādi Buddha, the primordial Buddha, as their Supreme God, the (historical) Buddha and *bodhisattva*s as prophets, and the Tipitaka, *Dhammapada*, and *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan* as their holy scriptures.[124] Upon discussing the nature of Ādi Buddha with Indonesian Buddhist monks in Indonesia, Berzin recalls, they "concluded that there is no reason to feel uncomfortable in saying that Buddhism accepts a creator God." It was precisely on the basis of this conviction that he embarked on a tour of dialoguing with Muslims in 1994.[125]

Berzin's strong willingness to embrace the ideas of his dialogue partners also manifests itself in his active use of major Islamic doctrinal frameworks that could accommodate Buddhism in an inclusivist fashion. Through his dialogue with scholars of Islamic law and philosophy in Turkey, for example, he learned of the major Muslim theories of Qur'anic references to the Buddha (as Dhu-l Kifl, and associated with the "fig tree"), of Buddhists belonging to the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), and of the Buddha being a prophet,[126] all of which he has actively been mentioning in other Buddhist-Muslim dialogues. While the tendency to introduce inclusivist views 'on the side' for specific purposes or effect, as noted above, is found among other scholars of a parallelist approach, they tend to resort to the teachings of their own tradition in doing so. Given that they explain the presence of Buddhism from an Islamic perspective, thereby technically compromising the former's particularities, the active reference that Berzin makes, as a Buddhist, to these Islamic theories of

123 These are Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, which was added in 2006. It has been observed, however, that Pancasila has largely failed to give rise to the inclusive society it was originally envisaged to foster. Chiara Formichi, "The Limits of Pancasila as a Framework for Pluralism," in *Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: Threats and Opportunities for Democracy*, ed. Chiara Formichi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), see esp. 6–7.

124 Ashin Jinarakkhita (1923–2002), the leader of the Buddhayāna school, was instrumental in elevating the position of Ādi Buddha, as found in *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan*, an anonymous Mahāyāna Buddhist text written in East Java in the tenth century. A statement made in 1965 also declared that Avalokiteśvara is the creator: Iem Brown, "Contemporary Indonesian Buddhism and Monotheism," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 18: 1 (1987), 111f. Theravāda Buddhists, who found accepting Ādi Buddha as a Supreme God problematic, have instead interpreted God as referring to the Unconditional or Absolute, i.e., the Three Jewels. Ibid., 115–6.

125 Berzin, "Islamic-Buddhist Dialogue."

126 Ibid.

Buddhism is remarkable. One possible reason for this striking approach is his profound sympathy for Muslims and wish to understand their points of view, as is evidenced by his claim that his "approach [in dialogue] has been to learn from the Muslim audience." This approach partly stems from his acknowledgment that "Islam has been highly misrepresented in the standard histories – where it is basically indicated that the Muslim came into Buddhist cultures and destroyed everything," despite the long history of "constructive" interaction between Buddhists and Muslims, especially in Central Asia.[127] In other words, it constitutes an important part of his approach to dialogue to 'give Muslims a voice' in times when Islam is often misunderstood. As long as such Islamic tools of inclusivism help facilitate his personal dialogue with Muslims, he is happy to employ them.

The sympathetic stance that Berzin displays toward Muslims is in stark contrast to the approach of See Hoon Peow discussed above, who has criticized the Tibetan Buddhist scholar for fitting Buddhism around Islam. This clearly shows that, despite being formulated outside Malaysia, Berzin's view influences, and participates in, the debate on Buddhism and Islam in the country. In this case, it serves as a counter-example to how Malaysian Buddhists would like to improve Buddhist-Muslim relations, by highlighting the discomfort they feel about the inferior position Buddhism has been reduced to accepting vis-à-vis Islam. Operating in the socio-political contexts of Malaysia, where the dominance of Islam over other religions is felt on a day-to-day basis, it is almost inevitable that See's gaze on Muslims is less sympathetic than Berzin's. He does not have the luxury to feel sorry for Muslims being placed in a disadvantaged position globally. As a member of a minority religious community, it is of paramount importance for him not to be dragged deeper into the hegemonic discourse created by Muslims in his own society. That would be tantamount to continuing to accept Buddhists' secondary position to Muslims and adding to the sense of inferiority which they have already been made to feel.

The same can also be said about the difference of attitude between Berzin and See toward recognizing Ādi Buddha as a Buddhist equivalent of God. For Buddhists in Malaysia, accepting a God would reduce their own tradition to being a version of Islam, and compromise their sense of identity, a step not preferred where the distinction between being Muslim and non-Muslim carries significant socio-political weight. Even purely in terms of doctrines, it may not be easy for many Buddhists to accept God as such, especially for those who,

127 Akpinar and Berzin, "Interview."

like See, actively define themselves as the followers of "non-theism," as the step would entail sacrificing one of the main characteristics of Buddhism as they understand them.[128] Although Indonesian Buddhists have taken this step to gain official recognition, it is clear from Berzin's description quoted above that they initially felt "uncomfortable" in claiming Ādi Buddha as their God. It is thus no surprise if some Buddhists, like See, wonder why Berzin has chosen to provide a new interpretation of Ādi Buddha, an extremely important concept in Tibetan Buddhism, the tradition he represents. Wouldn't he like to protect the specific understanding of this central notion, as traditionally embraced by Buddhists themselves?

The highly active stance that Berzin, like Buddhadasa mentioned above, assumes toward employing Islamic doctrines and recognizing a Buddhist equivalent of God for the purpose of inter-religious dialogue and understanding marks a new trend in contemporary Buddhist approaches to Islam. Being aware that the non-theistic worldview of Buddhism poses a big problem for Muslims (or the followers of monotheism in general), they attempt to tackle this potentially debilitating doctrinal conundrum and foster a sense of solidarity between Buddhists and Muslims. This is achieved through emphasizing the ultimate truth in Buddhism, whether it is the Dharma, emptiness, or Ādi Buddha, and comparing it to God to varying degrees.

When comparing their views with those found in earlier Buddhist discussions of Islam, and those of other contemporary Buddhists, their approaches appear highly innovative. Buddhadasa, a Theravāda monk, freely resorts to the generally Mahāyāna concepts of *ekayāna*, *trikāya*, and emptiness, using the latter almost interchangeably with the Dhamma. His reference to Ādi Buddha is also notable, given the prominent position accorded to the historical Buddha in the Theravāda tradition. Although he does not specifically discuss Islam or show a detailed understanding of the notion of God in Islam, his willingness to derive inspiration from the Qur'anic teachings strongly indicates his openness toward Islam.

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128 Buddhist resistance to considering such doctrinal bridges has also been observed in major international Buddhist-Muslim dialogue sessions. In one of the series of dialogue session organized by UNESCO at Colombia University in 2002, for example, the Muslim attempt to explore the possible relation between Muslim and Buddhist conceptions of ultimate reality did not go down so well with Buddhist participants. Liao Yi and Habito, eds., *Listening*, 35–7, 185; Schmidt-Leukel, "Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue," 351. Although it was not pursued in detail, comparability of the principle of cause and effect (i.e., Dharma) and the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), and the question of whether Buddhists may qualify as the People of the Book were also mentioned in the Barcelona session. Liao Yi and Habito, eds., *Listening*, 407–8, 428.

Unlike Buddhadasa, Berzin discusses Islam specifically, rather than referencing it merely when referring to Christianity.[129] The most innovative aspect of his approach is the way he presents God from the Islamic perspective, calling Him 'Allah' rather than God, thereby highlighting the specificity of the Islamic understanding of God. By recognizing the fundamentally unknown, no-thing nature of God, he has devised a way to relate Buddhism and Islam on the level of the ultimate truth. Considering how indefinable emptiness is considered in the Buddhist tradition, Berzin's connection of this ineffability with that of God is highly unusual among contemporary Buddhist scholars. However, as Berzin himself notes, the question of God is so crucial for most Muslims that it is virtually impossible to establish a comfortable ground for dialogue with them unless one recognizes some highest divine ground.[130] By considering the Islamic definition of God and the Muslim sensitivity concerning the question of God, he has attempted to create an environment that is more conducive to an open Buddhist-Muslim dialogue.[131]

Indeed, the creation of an environment suitable to Buddhist-Muslim (or for Buddhadasa, Buddhist-Christian) dialogue seems to be the underlying reason why Buddhadasa and Berzin resort to doctrinal arguments, sometimes seemingly even at the risk of undermining traditional formulations in Buddhist doctrines.[132] It is possible to say, perhaps, that theirs is an attempt to overcome the psychological gap created by the perceived doctrinal remoteness between Buddhism and Islam (or the so-called Abrahamic religions in general), a

129 A tendency to understand Islam through analogy with Christianity is also found among some contemporary Japanese Buddhists, (see Chapter 6).

130 This is also my experience when explaining Buddhism to Muslims. It is vital to acknowledge some monotheistic idea at the outset; once it is known that there is also a 'God-like entity' (e.g., Amida Buddha) in Buddhism, Muslims are more willing to engage in discussion.

131 Berzin has recently suggested that the issue of shared ethics and the concept of holy war (as having two levels) be prioritized over the question of God, for the purpose of fostering world peace. Berzin, "Buddhist-Muslim Doctrinal Relations," 228. In terms of their mutual understanding, however, the importance of relating to the concept of God, as he states elsewhere, seems to remain essential.

132 Yet, the innovative interpretations of Buddhist doctrines proposed by Buddhadasa and Berzin are not just simply a result of theological pragmatism that threatens to fall outside the Buddhist 'orthodoxy.' Rather, the teleological moves they make may be regarded as a living manifestation of the Buddhist idea of *upāya* (skillful means), employed to suit the needs of different contexts without compromising the essential teaching of one's own tradition. Notable cases in point are Buddhadasa's willingness to resort to Mahāyāna teachings as well as Islamic concepts, and Berzin's decision to utilize various interpretations he learned from both Buddhists and Muslims to kickstart the dialogue with Muslims.

perception that could hinder inter-religious harmony and mutual acceptance.[133] Although they are not focused on addressing urgent socio-political issues, such as those unfolding in southern Thailand or Malaysia, their views may also indirectly contribute to resolving such practical communal problems that Buddhists and Muslims encounter by helping them foster a more positive, accommodating attitude toward each other, or serving as guidelines for the followers of their traditions in dealing with Muslims.[134]

5.2 *Metaphysical Parallelism: Reza Shah-Kazemi*

Reza Shah-Kazemi (1960-) is a British scholar of a Pakistani-Shi'a background, affiliated with the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, UK. He specializes in Islamic Studies and comparative mysticism, with a focus on Shi'a and Sufi teachings. Shah-Kazemi came into the scene of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in 2010 with his *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism*, which is to date the most comprehensive comparative study of Buddhist and Islamic teachings.[135] Unlike other authors with parallelist views discussed in this book, who came to develop their parallelist approach to Buddhist-Muslim theology as a personal initiative, Shah-Kazemi was commissioned to write this volume. It is part of the inter-religious initiative undertaken by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, a Jordanian royal and scholar. The book was preceded by *A Common Word Between Us and You* (2007), Muslim scholars and leaders' response to Pope Benedict's controversial Regensburg speech (delivered in 2006) which included some negative views of Islam.[136] As its title suggests, the Common Ground project has a parallelist agenda; it is an exploration of commonalities between Buddhism and Islam with a view to facilitating dialogue. As such, the work has a Foreword by the fourteenth Dalai Lama and an Afterword by Hamza Yusuf, a well-known Muslim leader from the USA. The overall goal of the work is described by emphasizing the importance of employing parallelism:

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133 It is, therefore, not an accident that some of the major efforts made in dialogue and discussions to explore doctrinal compatibilities between Buddhism and Islam were undertaken after the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001.

134 This is also true of the stances found among other notable Buddhist leaders with extensive international careers, such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. For more on the increasing use of doctrinal discussions among contemporary Buddhist scholars for the purpose of enhancing inter-religious harmony, see Obuse, "Finding God in Buddhism," esp. 425–6.

135 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*.

136 For more on this document, see its official website. Royal Aal Al Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "A Common Word," https://www.acommonword.com [accessed 19 August 2022].

> It is our hope that in the light of these affinities the adherents of each religion might come to appreciate more deeply the value of the religion of the other, and to place the profound differences between their traditions within a context defined by mutual respect: it might help Muslims to see Buddhism as a true religion or *dīn*, and Buddhists to see Islam as an authentic *dharma*.[137]

Unlike earlier contributions to dialogue which were motivated by specific political contentions, the aim of the Common Ground project is expressed in less concrete terms, that is, "to ameliorate tensions between two religious communities" and to have "the same kind of global effects between Muslims and Buddhists that *A Common Word Between Us and You* did between Muslims and Christians,"[138] Rather, the emphasis on the importance of finding "spiritual [c]ommon [g]round" between Buddhists and Muslims, "despite all of the many irreconcilable and unbridgeable doctrinal, theological, juridical and other differences that we do have between us and that we cannot and must not deny,"[139] indicates that the main concern of the volume is to alleviate the sense of remoteness between Buddhists and Muslims derived from the commonly perceived differences between the teachings of their traditions. Yet, despite the strong insistence on respecting the differences and staying away from "the dangers of syncretism," Prince Ghazi foreshadows the extent to which the volume goes with the comparison when he says: "finding religious [c]ommon [g]round is fruitful, because Muslims at least will never be able to be whole-heartedly enthusiastic about any ethic that does not even mention God or refer back to Him."[140]

No detailed explanation is provided as to why Shah-Kazemi was commissioned to write this volume. In its Introduction, he is presented simply as "one of the Royal Academy's Fellows … a respected specialist in Islamic mysticism and a leading author in comparative religion."[141] Although he had no plans to write this kind of book, Shah-Kazemi says he was "a humble student and admirer of Buddhism."[142] It was probably his familiarity with Buddhism,

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137 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 7.

138 Bin Muhammad, "Introduction." x.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

142 He was first requested to write a short comparative article for a Buddhist-Muslim conference envisaged by the Dalai Lama, which later developed into a book form: Reza Shah-Kazemi, public lecture on "Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism," at

combined with his expertise in comparative religion and mysticism, interest in inter-religious dialogue (and, we may add, identification with perennialism) that led to the commission.[143]

At the outset of his comparative exploration of Buddhism and Islam, Shah-Kazemi argues that it should focus on "spirituality and morality," as there are "irreducible" differences between the two traditions "on the level of formal doctrine, ritual practice and spiritual 'style,'" or more simply put, "dogma and ritual."[144] Despite this caveat, he does discuss major doctrinal tenets of Buddhism and Islam, eventually pointing out parallels between Buddhist and Islamic concepts at the level of the ultimate truth. He explains his rationale thus:

> The question of ultimate truth and reality cannot … be left out of any dialogue that wishes to go beyond scratching the surface of ethical agreement. It is for this reason that … we have devoted considerable attention to the question of the supposed 'atheism'—or, more accurately, 'non-theism'—of Buddhism, for it is this apparent denial of God that constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to effective dialogue between the adherents of Buddhism and other religious traditions.[145]

Shah-Kazemi's parallelism between Buddhism and Islam rests on the identification of the Buddhist notion of Dharma as corresponding to the three major aspects of Islam: namely, *al-ḥaqīqah*, *al-ṭarīqah*, and *al-sharīʿah*, which he translates as "Essential Reality, Spiritual Path," and "Religious Law," respectively.[146] These are also said to be covered by the important divine name *al-ḥaqq* ("The Real" or "The True"), which thus constitutes the most direct Islamic equivalent of Dharma.[147] In particular, he highlights the identification of ultimate reality in Buddhism with "what monotheists refer to as God; or more precisely, in Islamic terms, to the Essence (*al-Dhāt*) of God,"[148] or the absolute Truth/Reality, observing that this "conceptual affinity at the metaphysical level can help bring the two traditions into harmony, however much the orthodox or

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Cambridge Muslim College (2013) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWvgdU1C-UQ [accessed 21 August 2020].

143 On Shah-Kazemi's perennialist background, see Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 329, 346–56.

144 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 1. The reference to the difference of "style" here seems to imply the sameness of essence, which may reflect the author's perennialist conviction.

145 Ibid., 5.

146 Ibid., 63.

147 Ibid., 5, 63–4.

148 Ibid., 5.

conventional frameworks of the two traditions contradict each other."[149] The repeated emphasis on the doctrinal irreconcilability between Buddhism and Islam may seem to contradict the assertive proposition of parallels made by the author. Yet, this is perhaps a reflection of his view of doctrine as official dogmas—distinct from the type of metaphysical observations made possible via mystical philosophy, which he resorts to in establishing his parallels—rather than a contradiction.

In arguing that "the ultimate Reality to which Islam and Buddhism testify is one and the same," Shah-Kazemi focuses on oneness, a metaphysical concept to be realized through mystical experience. According to him, this concept, central to the Islamic conception of God, finds its counterpart in the Buddha's description of *nirvāṇa* as "'unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded.'" He views the latter as expressing a "clear affirmation of the Absolute," thereby arguing for the positive interpretation of the absence of reference to God in the Buddha's discourse: "his 'non-theism' will not be seen as negating the Essence of the Absolute which transcends all attributes, but rather, as methodically ignoring every attribute that can be predicated of this Absolute – ignoring[,] that is, the Personal divinity, for the sake of an exclusive focus on the supra-Personal Essence."[150] Having thus denied that Buddhism is atheism, he attributes the lack of reference to the "source of creation" in Buddhism to the urgent "imperative of escape from the conditioned to the unconditioned."[151] The idea of a creator would "detract from the intensity of concentration required for taking the leap from the present moment into eternity," as it involves "the temporal notions of past and future," which should be ignored because "they do not exist."[152] Moreover, he regards the radical notion of transcendence found in Buddhism as a useful lesson for Muslims about the ineffability of God, as "[n]o human conception of God – even if fashioned by ideas received through Revelation – can be identified with the transcendent reality of the divine Essence," which "transcend[s] all Names and Qualities."[153] This is indeed the fundamental principle of the Islamic worldview on which Shah-Kazemi's parallelism is built, which sets his work apart from that of other contemporary Muslim commentators on Buddhism.

The Islamic concept of the transcendental, ineffable Essence of God, which appears in concrete manifestations such as divine names (through the

149 Ibid., 6.
150 Ibid., 31.
151 Ibid., 36, 38.
152 Ibid., 38.
153 Ibid., 39–40.

distinction of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*, meaning transcendence and anthropomorphism, or similarity, respectively) is specifically compared to the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of "Void" (i.e., emptiness), which, while being utterly inconceivable, similarly manifests itself "on the level of form."[154] The parallelism between the Essence of God as the eternal source of all things and emptiness stands precisely because the Dharma, as emptiness, is full of suchness (Skt. *tathatā*). As such it fills all 'empty' things, which are otherwise unreal, thus working as the ultimate ground of all things. It is 'empty' only in that it is other than the world of things and is therefore non-reifiable.[155] The relationship between the Absolute and its manifestations is further explained, following al-Ghazali, through a mystical vision of the unity of God, whereby all that exists only exists through God, as God's Face. The vision of God being "utterly transcendent and inescapably immanent," as Shah-Kazemi argues, finds a parallel expression in the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of the unity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, a radical view of non-duality, or the principle of *tawḥīd*, which is to be experienced in the state of *fanā'*.[156]

The common worldview centered around the one Absolute shared by Islam and Buddhism, predicated on the metaphysical principles of *tawḥīd* and emptiness respectively, is explored further through the ways in which it is worshipped. While differing in form, Shah-Kazemi argues, the Buddhist and Islamic ways of worship converge through "the extraordinary parallels" between the Islamic practice of *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and the Buddhist invocation of the name(s) of the Buddha (Ja. *nenbutsu*), which are supported by "analogous principles."[157] To bring out these, he focuses on the salvific role assumed by Buddha Amitābha (Ja. Amida) in Pure Land traditions, in which "[o]ne is 'saved' by *Amida* by being resurrected after death in his 'Pure [L]and', the *Sukhāvatī* or 'Paradise of Bliss', descriptions of which closely resemble those of the Qur'anic Paradise," almost as if he was reading Islam into Pure Land Buddhism.[158] In discussing specific Buddhas, Shah-Kazemi actively establishes parallels between their attributes and the divine names in Islam. It is argued that Amitābha, being "the infinite Light, streaming forth from the Absolute, which both enlightens and saves," embodies the "two divine Names, *al-Nūr* ("The Light") and *al-Rahīm* ("The Merciful")."[159] Ādi Buddha, the primordial

154 Ibid., 40–43.
155 Ibid., 44–5.
156 Ibid., 47–9.
157 Ibid., 64, 77.
158 Ibid., 65. For initiatives of dialogue between Japanese Pure Land Buddhists of the Jōdo-shin tradition and Shi'a Muslims, see Chapter 6.
159 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 65.

Buddha sometimes considered to be the origin of all things (as seen in the example of Berzin above), is said to correspond to the divine name *al-awwal* ("The First").[160] Further resonance between Pure Land Buddhist and Islamic worship is found in the importance placed in both traditions on reliance on "the grace and power of the [absolute] 'Other.'"[161] The notion, expressed by the terms *tariki* (Ja. the Other Power) and *tawakkul* (Ar. reliance, trust) respectively, refers to the practice of "removal of self-centered consciousness," "a radical mode of self-effacement" predicated on the afore-mentioned teaching of unreality or emptiness of individual beings or things (Skt. *dharma*s).[162] This attitude is said to be exemplified typically by Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land (Jōdo) school of Buddhism in Japan, who regarded *nenbutsu* as the means of salvation par excellence, and Prophet Muhammad, who recommended dwelling in perpetual *dhikr*.[163]

The common focus on the practice of self-effacement also leads Shah-Kazemi to draw on the Buddhist identification of realizing emptiness with embodying the Dharma in arguing for its similarity to Islam, where prophets and saints can manifest God's qualities as the ultimate realization of *tawḥīd*, rather than via their divinization.[164] By effacing themselves, or being 'empty,' they allow themselves to be "free passage for divine transcendence to manifest through [them] as divine immanence."[165] Thus, the author argues, that devotion to the Prophet, a practice often criticized as a form of *shirk* in Islam, has the principle of *tawḥīd* as its basis, hence constitutes ultimately remembrance of God. When people bless the Prophet, it is God that is really blessed.[166] The acceptability of devotional practice addressed to such holy beings in Islam, as manifestations of divine qualities, also helps to justify the use of Buddha's image "as a legitimate form of remembrance of God," thus invalidating the common Muslim criticism of the Buddhist practice for constituting idolatry.[167] Here one sees how Shah-Kazemi's comparative theological exploration has helped him to deepen understanding of the theological legitimacy of

160 Ibid., 66.
161 Ibid., 68.
162 Ibid., 68.
163 Ibid., 67–8.
164 Ibid., 72. See also p.50 on the identification of the Truth and the person who realizes it.
165 Ibid., 71.
166 It is emphasized that the Prophet, being a "slave of God" (Ar. *'abd allah*), is empty of himself: ibid., 75–6. The idea of enslavement to God in Islam is compared by a Japanese Jōdo-shin Buddhist to the attitude of the devotee in their tradition, who is "slave to Nyorai" (i.e., Amida Buddha): see Chapter 6.
167 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 72.

devotional practice in Islam, by examining it through its Buddhist counterpart and the Buddhist doctrines that supposedly support it. Ultimately, it should not be a "controversy" hindering Buddhist-Muslim dialogue.[168]

Having established the correspondence between "the supreme goals in Buddhism" and "the Essence of God in Islam," Shah-Kazemi finally discusses parallels between ethical teachings in the two traditions. He inflects the question of ethics, a topic commonly taken up in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, differently from many other commentators on Buddhism and Islam, who tend to find commonalities between their ethical teachings 'despite' the fundamental theological difference that lies between them. For Shah-Kazemi, the topic of shared ethics can and should be an important bridge between Buddhism and Islam, precisely because there is a deeper affinity between the two on the metaphysical, mystical, and soteriological planes which undergird their ethics.[169] Reiterating the common goal of Buddhism and Islam as the "quest for the 'Face' of God" or the Absolute by transcending the ego, he highlights the importance of detachment (Ar. *zuhd*) as a key component of the path leading to the overcoming of suffering in the world, the theme central to Buddhist soteriology but also highlighted in Islam.[170] The Buddhist notion of mindfulness, or constant watch over one's desire for worldly rewards that are impermanent and ultimately illusory (Pali. *anicca*), is thus equated with the Islamic practice of *taqwā* as "mindfulness of God," which allows human beings to "'guard' … themselves against the perils of attachment to the 'life of the world.'"[171] In another profound moment of "mutual illumination" between Buddhism and Islam, Shah-Kazemi further applies the Buddhist teaching of impermanence and dependent origination to Qur'anic injunctions against worldly desire, arguing that those who are full of desire for worldly things (believing them to be real) and obsessed with serving one's ego commit "subtle polytheism (or idolatry, *shirk*)," even if they claim to believe in God.[172] In other words, "[t]he sense of the 'I' eclipses the light of divine guidance. One may even make great exertions for the same of God and religion, but be bound by this hidden idolatry of the self."[173] Those who are caught up with the danger of samsaric existence are "de facto [in the] state of disbelief."[174] Here, instead of drawing direct parallels,

168 Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism*, 198.
169 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 79.
170 Ibid., 80–81.
171 Ibid., 81–2.
172 Ibid., 84–7.
173 Ibid., 88.
174 Ibid., 89.

Shah-Kazemi explains a concept of one tradition, in this case Islam, using the teachings of another tradition, thereby developing a subtle but effective way to impress the parallelism on readers' minds.[175] His strategy shows particular sophistication in this example as it explains idolatry in Islam through a tradition commonly accused of being idolatrous (i.e., Buddhism). In letting the two traditions 'dialogue' with each other on one of the most controversial topics in Buddhist-Muslim engagements, Shah-Kazemi establishes a brand new frontier in contemporary efforts of dialogue. It is also remarkable that this innovative approach was employed as part of the project of an (Islamic) institution with an official mandate in fostering inter-religious dialogue, rather than coming from an isolated voice of a gifted thinker.[176]

It is against the background of the profound importance of watchfulness against one's attachment to worldliness that Shah-Kazemi undertakes his analysis of "loving compassion," the quality central to ethical teachings presented as *karuṇā* and *raḥmah* in Buddhism and Islam respectively. Here again, it is made clear that the 'ethical' is deeply predicated on the 'spiritual.' According to him, compassion "is not just a sentiment, but an existential quality." This is because it "presupposes a concrete sense of participation in the suffering of others," which derives only from the realization of the Reality, whereby "the illusion of separation is overcome, the suffering of the other becomes one's own, and the virtues of compassion and mercy, generosity and love become the hallmarks of the character of one who has truly realized Unity."[177] It means that compassion, as a human quality, is "inseparable from the Absolute."[178] The Islamic conception of *raḥmah* is considered particularly similar to the concept of compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism in terms of function, "wherein compassion comes to play a determinative role, elevated as the very principle, cosmological and not ethical, which motivates the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas."[179] More specifically, compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism is said

175 Similar attempts to render one tradition through the philosophical tenets of another have also been made by Toshihiko Izutsu: see Chapter 6.

176 It remains to be seen how it will be utilized in the contexts of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue on the ground, for example in Southeast Asia, and more specifically whether Shah-Kazemi's experimental move toward highlighting the message of Islam through the lenses of Buddhism may be regarded negatively by Yusuf, his fellow parallelist, for "substituting one tradition with another."

177 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 92.

178 Ibid., 93.

179 Ibid., 93. *Raḥmah* is also said to be closely connected with, and encompassed within the concept of love (Ar. *maḥabba*) in Islam, which finds its Buddhist counterpart in the commonly used compound of *mettā* (Skt. *maitrī*)-*karuṇā*. Ibid., 93–5.

to "take on altogether mythological dimensions and enter into the definition of what most closely approximates the Personal God in Buddhism."[180] Drawing on the *trikāya* line of thought, Shah-Kazemi describes such cosmic Buddhas as Ādi Buddha, Vairocana, and Amitābha as "a personalization of the Absolute [i.e., *ṇirvāna*, emptiness or the Dharma in Buddhism], … without [which] it cannot enter into engagement with human persons." This acknowledgment leads to a further structural parallelism between the two traditions, wherein "[the] personal dimension does not in any way diminish the absoluteness of the Absolute."[181] Here, the doctrinal diversity within Buddhism is clarified in terms of how ultimate reality is explained through the twofold conception of God in Islam. Shah-Kazemi suggests that the relationship between ideas of the Absolute as the Essence and as designated by divine names and qualities can help understand "the Mahayana-Hinayana [i.e., Theravāda] polarity within Buddhism," arguing that the putative "Mahayana 'theism' in no way compromises early Buddhism's insistence on the transcendence of the Dhamma."[182]

Having established that Buddhism and Islam concur that the ultimate source of compassion is the Absolute,[183] Shah-Kazemi comes back to the issue of creation, with an attempt to identify a Buddhist equivalent of the Islamic conception of *raḥmah* as creator, "a love which gives of itself."[184] To demonstrate that in some strands of Mahāyāna Buddhism "the expressions of love and compassion … are identified with the creative power of the Absolute,"[185] he quotes a contemporary Jōdo-shin Buddhist author, Kenryo Kanamatsu (1915–86), who says, "From the Eternal Love do all things have their birth."[186] The creative function of the *dharmakāya* is clearly expressed when the same Japanese author further says of its principal qualities: "The Great Compassion is creator while the Great Wisdom contemplates."[187] While conceding that Jōdo-shin Buddhism "cannot be taken as representative of the broad Buddhist tradition," Shah-Kazemi views the Islamic/Jōdo-shin parallels as a further basis for arguing that the general Buddhist silence on the question of creator God should not lead to "reciprocal rejection."[188] Here, the possibility of Buddhist-Muslim

180 Ibid., 95.
181 Ibid., 97.
182 Ibid., 97–8; see also 101–3.
183 Ibid., 96f.
184 Ibid., 103.
185 Ibid., 106.
186 Kenryo Kanamatsu, *Naturalness: A Classic of Shin Buddhism* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002), 113, quoted in Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 105.
187 Kanamatsu, *Naturalness*, 63, quoted in Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 106.
188 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 109.

dialogue is emphatically upheld on the ground that Buddhism does not deny the principle of creation, which is of utmost centrality to the Islamic conception of God.

Shah-Kazemi's insistence on the question of a creator God suggests just how crucial this notion is to Islam. It also confirms Prince Ghazi's observation mentioned above on how important it is for Muslims to be able to identify God in a tradition which they are to discuss. While this explains the strong focus placed on the parallelism between Buddhist and Islamic conceptions of ultimate reality in his work, Shah-Kazemi also compares the concepts of messenger and Buddha. Here, he starts by elaborating on the possibility of regarding the Buddha as a messenger/prophet as per the classical perspective of Islamic inclusivism, and uses it as a stepping stone for a deeper exploration of parallels between the Buddha and the prophet in terms of their roles, experiences, and teachings. Shah-Kazemi first emphasizes that, despite the possibility that the recognition granted to Buddhism as the People of the Book (hence the *dhimmī* status granted to Buddhists) by Muslim rulers of the past is a result of their pragmatism, this has never been regarded as theologically problematic by Muslim scholars.[189] As if to confirm the validity of this decision, he points out that the category of the People of the Book is flexible, given that it covers all "revealed religions," highlighting, in a pluralist tone, the unity of the message communicated by diverse messengers in diverse settings, i.e., in their own languages.[190] The general possibility of regarding the Buddha as a messenger, within the scheme of the Islamic notion of prophethood, is reinforced by the dual meaning of *tathāgata*, the main epithet of the Buddha, namely, "thus come" and "thus gone," quoting Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi: the Buddha "*comes* into our midst bearing the message of deathlessness to which he has *gone* by his own practice of the path."[191] The Buddha-messenger bridge manifests itself in a more parallelist manner when the idea of each of the fully enlightened Buddhas establishing a "Dispensation" of the truth when it is lost and needed is further considered to constitute a significant parallel with that of the doctrine of prophethood in Islam.[192]

The purported messengership of the Buddha is also reinforced through the similarity of the ethical content of the Buddha's message and that of Prophet

189 Ibid., 7–10.

190 Ibid., 12–3.

191 Bhikku Nanamoli and Bhikku Bodhi trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), 24, quoted in Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 14.

192 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 14.

Muhammad (i.e., the Qur'an), specifically the importance attached to "the nature of one's actions," which determines one's state in the hereafter, or "the principle of accountability."[193] Despite the presence of some "profound differences" (notably this posthumous recompense being meted out by a personal God as opposed to it operating in a "strictly impersonal" manner in Buddhism), Shah-Kazemi insists that "[t]he affinity remains … on the level of principle."[194]

The nature of the Buddha's enlightenment (*bodhi*) is also explored in comparison with the revelatory/prophetic experience in Islam, with a view to showing that Buddhist enlightenment has "this transcendent source" rather than happening only from within, or immanently.[195] Shah-Kazemi accomplishes this step by first identifying two different aspects of the Buddha's enlightenment, "one … which was proper to him alone, and the other which is universally accessible," which he regards as corresponding to the Islamic concept of *risālah* (message specific to an individual prophet) and *walāyah* (quality of sainthood in general) respectively.[196] In other words, insofar as the Buddha's enlightenment, which manifested itself as a particular message which he conveyed as a unique event, is also something that all other beings can, technically, participate in, he is both *rasūl* (messenger) and *walī* (saint), as was the Prophet.[197] Taking further cues from the reference to "the divine eye, which is purified and surpassed the human," with which the Buddha claims to have seen the Truth, and the Buddhist doctrine of no-self, Shah-Kazemi argues that "the source of that enlightenment cannot possibly be the empirical self."[198] Thus he concludes: "Gautama, as a human being, could only have attained his enlightenment by virtue of an objective principle infinitely transcending his own humanity, and that objective principle is the source of all revelation, that which in Islam is called Allah."[199] He further notes, as per the Mahāyāna doctrine of *trikāya*, that the Dharmic principle, or the ultimate Tathāgata, reveals itself in modes suited to various human needs and conditions as skillful means (*upāya*), to reinforce his argument that the Buddha can be regarded

193 Ibid., 17.

194 Ibid., 18. Another significant difference would be that in Buddhism this principle works to produce 'results' of one's actions when one is still alive, not only after one's death. It may also be objected concerning the principle of accountability that in Buddhism one has accountability to oneself, rather than to the Absolute, as in Islam: see ibid., 19.

195 Ibid., 19.

196 Ibid., 21.

197 Ibid., 20–21.

198 Ibid., 19-22. The Buddha's description of enlightenment which involved the reference to "the divine eye" is quoted on pages 16-7 from *The Middle Length Discourses*, 105–6.

199 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 22.

as a messenger of God. Here, in a rare consideration of possible reactions from Buddhists to his views, this Muslim scholar adds the caveat, "however much such a designation be resisted by Buddhists themselves." For Shah-Kazemi, the Prophet-Buddha bridge provides an important opportunity for both Buddhists and Muslims to reflect on the affinity between the roles of these two prototypical holy beings, and on that between Buddhist and Islamic conceptions of ultimate reality.[200]

Shah-Kazemi, like Yusuf above, also fluctuates between parallelist and rather pluralist statements. At times "fundamental" differences are emphasized as "irreconcilable" and parallels are cautiously presented only as denoting "comparable" or "similar" features while on other occasions they are pronounced as the same or pointing to the same. This is surely attributable in part to the perennialist view he holds, which urges him to search for deeper metaphysical parallels instead of more incidental ones. This will then make him appear to be contradicting his commitment to parallelism or his insistence on the fundamental difference between the two traditions. At the same time, such fluctuations can be seen to point to the very nature—fluid and unstable—of the theological terrain which parallelists are treading. Their endeavors involve a creative tension, which consists in negotiating their wish to bring out the affinities between the two traditions while not compromising on their particularities.[201]

As stated above, *Common Ground* is the most detailed and comprehensive comparative reflection on Buddhist and Islamic teachings available to date. It distinguishes itself from other comparative works, especially thanks to the attention it pays to the internal diversity of Buddhism. The coverage of various strands of Mahāyāna Buddhism helps the author to establish a wide range of parallels between Buddhism and Islam, with Buddha Amitābha being presented as the closest Buddhist equivalent to the creator God in Islam.[202] Shah-Kazemi's attempt to make sense of the seeming discrepancies between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna doctrines as representing different aspects of the Islamic conception of God would also enable Buddhism, thanks to—rather than despite—its diversity, to be seen as a tradition comparable to Islam as a whole. The work can certainly serve as a significant source of inspiration for

200 Ibid., 23.

201 Shah-Kazemi's work emphasizes the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of each religion, whose external form, being a unique revelation, is irreducible to the essence of religion that underlies it. Jawad, "A Muslim Response," 229; Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, xxv.

202 Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 6–7.

Buddhist-Muslim dialogue. In grappling directly with the issues of non-theism and idolatry, the two main common sources of Muslim criticism of Buddhism, it will encourage more Muslims who have so far dismissed Buddhism as totally incompatible with Islam to open up to the possibility of engaging with Buddhists.

Shah-Kazemi's approach differs from that of Yusuf, his fellow Muslim parallelist, in two major ways: in terms of contents and contexts, or theologically and socially. The first is the choice of concepts involved in their parallelism. As we have seen above, Yusuf's parallels revolve primarily around the Prophet and the Buddha, mentioning only tangentially the possibility of comparing the Buddhist and Islamic conceptions of ultimate reality. Yusuf's cautious attitude toward bridging the two traditions on this level is also clear from his definition of parallelism, whereby different religions are compared to parallel lines that never meet except at certain junctions. Shah-Kazemi, too, emphasizes repeatedly how irreconcilable Buddhism and Islam are on the level of "formal dogma," yet provides forceful arguments for the affinity of the notions of the Absolute found in the two traditions on various levels. Compared with Yusuf, Shah-Kazemi at one point even indicates a complete concordance between the Buddhist and Islamic conceptions of ultimate reality, or the Real, so may seem rather audacious; he certainly goes much further than many Muslim commentators on Buddhism. Indeed, some of Yusuf's observations, such as his admonition against Muslims who try to search for God in Buddhism, suggest that he may regard Shah-Kazemi as going too far. This could be the reason why Yusuf almost never mentions Shah-Kazemi's work in his writings.

The difference in terms of content may be attributed to their personal theological convictions, particularly their understandings of God in Islam as well as their interpretations of Buddhism. While both employ Sufi ideas in comparing Buddhism and Islam, Yusuf does not share the perennialist conviction that runs deep through Shah-Kazemi's work. The detailed engagement with Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophies that Shah-Kazemi undertook, furthermore, may have made it easier for him to find parallels between Islam and Buddhism than for Yusuf, who initially developed his parallelism focusing on the Buddha as a human leader and moral exemplar, probably due to the familiarity he acquired with Theravāda Buddhism through living in Thailand. Given his recent engagement with the Lotus Sutra, and his growing openness to comparing the theistic and non-theistic notions of ultimate reality in Islam and Buddhism respectively, however, one cannot exclude the possibility that Yusuf may draw more direct parallels between God and Buddha/Dharma/emptiness in the future.

The second major difference between Yusuf and Shah-Kazemi is related to the social contexts in which they develop and employ their views, especially their levels of engagement with the ground realities of Buddhist-Muslim relations, which may also explain the theological difference mentioned above. As mentioned above, Yusuf has been an active participant in Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Southeast Asia, promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between the two communities. It is to that end that he has developed his parallelism, proposing potential bridges or points of mutual resonance between the two traditions. He has mentioned his parallelist ideas repeatedly and widely in dialogue sessions and academic lectures across the region; one can even say that it has become something of a mission/lifework for him to disseminate those views, given the urgent need he perceives to ameliorate Buddhist-Muslim relations, a point he has emphasized constantly in his writings. As he has lived and operated in the context of Buddhist-Muslim engagements on a day-to-day basis, on the other hand, it must be of paramount importance that the ideas he puts forward stay within the socially accepted parameters of these Southeast Asian societies; they can be novel, but not to such an extent that they may shut down the possibility of dialogue by alienating his fellow religionists, be they Buddhist or Muslim.

Shah-Kazemi has a considerably different mode of engaging in dialogue from Yusuf. Despite the official aim of *Common Ground* to facilitate and enhance dialogue between Buddhists and Muslims, he has not actively employed the parallelist views he proposes in his work to dialogue with Buddhists.[203] He is not inactive in dialogue, as seen, for example, in the fact that he participated (online) in the recent Buddhist-Muslim dialogue event organized in Malaysia, delivering a keynote speech. However, in such a context he tends to focus on discussing Islamic perspectives on the topic and seldom mentions the comparative analyses of Buddhism and Islam that he developed in *Common Ground*.

Unlike Yusuf, who always mentions concrete examples of communal tension and misunderstanding between Buddhists and Muslims in highlighting the need to promote inter-religious dialogue, no specific socio-political issues are quoted in Shah-Kazemi's work as the direct motivation for engaging in dialogic reflections. For example, no mention is made of the Taliban's destruction

203 As mentioned above, the commitment to establish parallelism between Buddhism and Islam that Shah-Kazemi displays in this work cannot be attributed solely to his personal decision, as in the cases of Berzin or Yusuf. Given the official aim of the project to find a "Common Ground," the book was certainly bound to involve some parallelist ideas. Yet Shah-Kazemi would not have agreed to undertake the task if he had not believed in the value of such an enterprise.

of the Bamiyan Buddhas, nor of the communal conflict in southern Thailand which, unlike the more recent events like the rise of Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, was already going on for a few decades at the time of the book's publication. This is also true of his treatment of historical events, most notably the putative destruction of Buddhism in India by Muslims. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the common narrative of the demise of Buddhism in India still constitutes a strong basis for the prejudice against Muslims among some Buddhists in Southeast Asia. Being aware of the graveness of this trend, Yusuf often points out the dubious historicity of the narrative to alleviate the negative feelings it has evoked in Buddhists. Shah-Kazemi, on the other hand, does not seem to take note of the serious implications that this series of events have on contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations. He only seems to imply that there is a misunderstanding about early Muslims' attitudes toward Buddhist places of worship when he briefly mentions, in a footnote, the Muslim destruction of Buddhist monasteries in India.[204] Such an omission (or the cursoriness of the treatment of this important topic) may not solely be the result of Shah-Kazemi's potential lack of familiarity with the living realities of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, for *Common Ground* may not have been geared toward the specific purpose of alleviating socio-political tension between Buddhists and Muslims.

Indeed, the connections Shah-Kazemi has had with Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, point to the possibility that he may be well-informed about the situations surrounding Buddhist-Muslim relations in the region, except that he does not mention these in his writings on Buddhism and Islam. It is also notable that, while he does not actively discuss socio-political issues now, Shah-Kazemi started his career on a more politically and socially engaged note. He has a first degree in International Relations and Politics and was initially pursuing a career as a specialist in the political affairs of Muslim societies. He was the founding editor of the Islamic World Report, through which he published volumes such as *Crisis in Chechnia: Russian Imperialism, Chechen Nationalism, Militant Sufism* and *Algeria: Revolution Revisited*.[205] His professional engagement with Malaysia started when he worked as a consultant for the Institute for Policy Research in Malaysia.[206] More recent, and particularly notable, is

204 He quotes Berzin to argue that such acts of destruction "are political exceptions which prove the religious rule: the rights of Hindus and Buddhists, as *dhimmī*s, were sacrosanct": Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground*, 9, see note 9.

205 Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Crisis in Chechnia: Russian Imperialism, Chechen Nationalism, Militant Sufism* (London: Islamic World Report, 1995); Reza Shah-Kazemi, ed., *Algeria: Revolution Revisited* (London: Islamic World Report, 1997).

206 Little is known about this employment, but it is likely to have been around the late 1990s.

his connection with the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies Malaysia (IAIS), a research think-tank founded in 2007 by Mohamed Hashim Kamali (1944-), an Afghan-born scholar of Islamic law whose connection with Malaysia goes back to the 1980s. One of the IAIS's missions is "to engage in inter-faith and inter-civilisation studies and address issues of concern to the negative profiling of Islam in media."[207] That the Common Ground project was highly congruous with the overall direction of the Institute's activities is also indicated by Kamali's preface to the book, in which he emphasizes the effort to review the "supportive evidence" in the Qur'an for Muslim recognition of Buddhism and Buddhists is commendable "on grounds of rationality and the spirit of civilizational renewal (*tajdīd*)," mentioning the official goal of his institute.[208] The sense of hope that Kamali had for the possible contribution that *Common Ground* might make to the promotion of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Malaysia is also clear from the fact that he invited Shah-Kazemi to discuss the contents of his book at the IAIS in January 2010, a few months before it was published. The session, titled "Common Ground: Spiritual and Ethical Affinities between Islam and Buddhism," was chaired by Kamali himself and featured a response from Ching Thing Ho, a Chinese Malaysian scholar from the University of Malaya.[209] This *de facto* book launch session suggests that the IAIS assumed, at least initially, an active role in publicizing and testing, if not applying right away, the ideas developed in the book, in line with its commitment to promoting dialogue. It also suggests that given the need to diversify the approaches to inter-religious relations and dialogue in Malaysia, Kamali viewed it as a good ground for introducing and developing further such parallelist ideas.[210]

What is equally important is that Shah-Kazemi probably learned through this session (as well as other opportunities he may have had while he was

207 IAIS (International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies Malaysia), "Vision & Mission," https://iais.org.my/about-sp-1100978955/vision-mission [accessed 18 June 2022].

208 IAIS, "The Institute," https://iais.org.my/about-sp-1100978955/the-institute[accessed 18 June 2022]. Its vision of civilizational renewal is in line with the notion of "Islam Hadhari" (civilizational Islam) proposed by former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is the patron of the Institute. Bakar, "Islam and the Challenge," 60–61.

209 IAIS, "Common Ground: Spiritual and Ethical Affinities between Islam and Buddhism," Past Events https://iais.org.my/events-sp-1744003054/past-events/item/445-common-ground-spiritual-and-ethical-affinities-between-islam-and-buddhism [accessed 18 June 2022].

210 On his view on the religious diversity in Malaysia, see, e.g., Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Diversity and Pluralism: A Qur'ānic Perspective," *Islam and Civilizational Renewal* 1: 1 (2009), 27–54.

visiting Malaysia) how his ideas were received by Malaysian Muslims and Buddhists, and what kind of doctrinal parallels would be accepted or resisted. While the controversy over pluralism had not started at the time of his book talk, he may also have subsequently learned, through his Malaysia connections or otherwise, about the conservative turn within Malaysian Muslim discourse on other religions. If so, he is likely to have felt that his generally universalist position might not be so welcome in Malaysia.[211]

If he is familiar with the actual situations surrounding Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Malaysia, the most important reason why Shah-Kazemi has refrained from discussing his ideas may then be his concern about potentially causing trouble and confrontation in the scenes of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue. Being aware of how daring his views might appear to some (especially Muslims), he has perhaps sought to avoid stirring public sentiment and causing confrontation by choosing not to mention them in public. It can also be said, conversely, that Shah-Kazemi was able to go much further with his parallelism in his book than Yusuf has done, precisely because he is not as directly involved in the actual stages of Buddhist-Muslim engagement in Asia as Yusuf. Yet the fact that Shah-Kazemi is not actively propagating his parallelist views, or that he did not write his book with the specific goal of enhancing Buddhist-Muslim relations in Southeast Asia, does not necessarily mean that they do not have an impact on the modes of Buddhist-Muslim engagement in the region. Indeed, it has been recommended at some dialogue sessions held in Malaysia, which indicates that some dialogue organizers have received its contents positively.[212] Being freely available online, moreover, it also has the potential to reach a wide readership and achieve good circulation among those who are interested in inter-religious engagements, even if they disagree with the author's approach.[213] *Common Ground* can thus enliven discussions on the affinity between Buddhism and Islam (or lack thereof) and influence

211 Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the* One, xxiv. See also Reza Shah-Kazemi, "Beyond Polemics and Pluralism: The Universal Message of the Qur'ān" in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad Hassan Khalil (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 87–102.

212 For example, it was recommended by the organizers of the "Online Islam-Buddhism Forum" mentioned in the previous chapter, which was jointly organized by TBCC and ABIM in September 2020.

213 It is available in various translations: Malaysian, Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and French. Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Translations," Islam and Buddhism https://www.islambuddhism.com/translations [accessed 19 August 2022]. The choice of target languages suggests that its intended readership is mainly Muslim.

the direction of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Malaysia and Southeast Asia as a whole.[214]

Berzin and Shah-Kazemi have taken stock of the situations surrounding Buddhist-Muslim relations in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively in developing and negotiating their parallelist conceptions. At the same time, their work stimulates the theological discussion between Buddhists and Muslims and helps develop further the debate on religious diversity in these societies.

While Southeast Asia may be regarded as the source of inspiration for parallelist ideas and the ideal testing ground for them, a thorough-going parallelism does not seem to be welcome yet. This is indicated by the fact that major proponents of parallelism come from outside Southeast Asia. Similarly, Kamali, who sought to publicize Shah-Kazemi's ideas in Malaysia, is originally from Afghanistan. By contrast, as shown above, it is not common for Malay Muslims to advocate doctrinal parallelism, especially on the level of ultimate reality. It is thus possible to say that the spread of Buddhist-Muslim parallelism within contemporary Southeast Asia has depended, and will most probably continue to depend, on the intellectual networks that connect scholars of non-Southeast Asian backgrounds with the region, who bring in a new perspective with the potential to counter the hegemonic discourse on religious diversity that has developed in the host society.

The next chapter investigates further what lies behind Buddhist and Muslim decisions to highlight or gloss over differences through examining the history of Buddhist-Muslim engagements in Japan, which has seen Japanese attitudes toward Islam fluctuate drastically as political situations change.

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214 In terms of potential readership of the book, Malaysia may be particularly promising within Southeast Asia due to the high level of English proficiency among its citizens.

CHAPTER 5

From Exoticism to Asian Brotherhood: The Japanese Engagement with Islam

Like those found in Southeast Asia, the modes of Buddhist-Muslim engagement in Japan have been greatly informed by the contexts of their times.[1] The present chapter examines Japanese perceptions of Islam and Muslims across history in three periods. The long early-to-modern period starts in the mid-eighth century and stretches until the end of Japan's so-called policy of national seclusion in 1854, providing a broad historical background for the developments of the subsequent periods. The late-colonial period runs up to the end of the Meiji era in 1912, covering the turbulent time of rapid Westernization and militarization. This is followed by the imperialist period, characterized by the progression of the country's expansionist agenda, which lasted till the end of World War II in 1945.[2] The sheer diachronic diversity of Japanese perceptions of Islam and Muslims, especially the rapid shift from a simple dismissal of Islam to an active political collaboration with Muslims seen from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, is an important reminder of the socio-political and geo-cultural dynamism that has driven Buddhist-Muslim engagements across history. This may tend to be forgotten nowadays, when more static views of Islam and Buddhist-Muslim relations predominate.

1 The Early-to-Modern Period (754–1854)

1.1 *Early Encounters*

Early in their history, the Japanese had no direct collective involvement with Muslims. They dealt only with their immediate neighbors such as China and

1 Major works currently available on historical interactions between the Japanese and Muslims include Hideaki Sugita, *Nihonjin no chūtō hakken* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1995), which discusses cultural exchange between Japan and the Middle East; and Fujio Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi* (Tokyo: Nihon Isurāmu Yūkō Renmei, 1988) on the history of Islam in Japan.

2 An earlier version of the discussion on the modern and imperialist periods has appeared in Kieko Obuse, "Japan's Political Collaboration with Muslims (1854–1945)," in *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies in South and Southeast Asia: The Politics behind Religious Rivalries*, ed. K. M. de Silva (Kandy: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2015), 217–39.

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Korea, and after the onset of the modern era with Europeans, particularly the Portuguese and the Dutch.[3] They eventually limited their official contact to a handful of countries, notably the Chinese and the Dutch, as part of the shogunate's policy, commonly known as national seclusion, which also prohibited the Japanese from traveling and returning from abroad. The oldest recorded occasion of a Japanese-Muslim encounter dates back to 754, when a Japanese envoy to the court of T'ang China sat next to an Arab delegate at an official reception.[4] This marks the beginning of Buddhist-Muslim relations in the history of Japan, after Japan's acceptance of Buddhism on an official level.[5]

While some members of the Chinese delegation sent to Japan seem to have been Muslim,[6] encounters also occurred between Japanese Buddhist monks visiting China and Muslim traders coming to China from the twelfth century onward. For example, a Tendai monk called Keisei Shōnin (1189–1268) obtained a Persian document at the port of Quanzhou in 1217. He believed this document to be a part of a Buddhist *sūtra* from *tenjiku*, which refers to the regions in and around India as well as unspecified lands beyond it.[7] It is also recorded that a possibly Muslim man from *tenjiku* called Hijiri (or Hishiri) arrived in Japan in 1374 and married a Japanese woman in 1376. The eldest of his three children, Musuru (Musul?), was a successful merchant affiliated with Kōfukuji, one of the most powerful Buddhist temples of the time, located in Nara, a former imperial capital. Through this connection he was ordained as a Buddhist monk, acquiring the dharma name Sainin (meaning "longing for the West").[8]

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3 The Islamic civilization traveled along the Silk Road and arrived in Japan via China. Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 17; Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi*, Ch. 1. The earliest example of such civilizational transmission is an Islamic vase which dates back to the late eighth century. The Japan Times, "Islamic Vase Shards Found in Nara," (5 July 2009) https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2009/07/05/national/islamic-vase-shards-found-in-nara/ [accessed 30 July 2024].

4 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 17.

5 Buddhism is considered to have been officially introduced to the Japanese court in 538 (or 552) and spread by major figures from the Imperial family such as Prince Shōtoku (574–622) and Emperor Shōmu (701–756). The former, a semi-legendary figure often dubbed as the founder of Japanese Buddhism, is still respected widely in Japan for his wisdom and virtue.

6 The first recorded Muslim visitor to Japan is a Uyghur man who arrived in Japan in 1275 as part of the Yuan delegation. James Harry Morris, "Some Reflections on the First Muslim Visitor to Japan," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 35: 3 (2018), 116–30.

7 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 25f. Japanese traders also met people from newly established Muslim communities in Southeast Asia around the fifteenth century, although very little is known about those encounters.

8 Sainin is particularly noted for his involvement in the Muromachi shogunate's trade with Ming China. Takeo Tanaka, *Chūsei kaigai kōshōshi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku

The arrival of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries in the middle of the sixteenth century marked the first proper encounter the Japanese had with so-called Abrahamic monotheism (in this case, Christianity). From then on, knowledge about the Islamic world would also be obtained from Europeans. A few Japanese also met Muslims in Nagasaki during the period of national seclusion, such as Malays serving Dutch personnel stationed there and Persian-speaking Muslim merchants identified as Moors (Ja. *mouru*), coming from what is now Thailand (Ayutthaya).[9] However, for the most part of the early-to modern period the Japanese remained isolated from the Islamic world.

1.2 *Japanese Writings of the Early-to-Modern Period*

Early Japanese literature gives little indication as to whether the Japanese had any awareness of the religious background of the Muslims they encountered. References to Islam from this period are found almost exclusively in geographical works, which suggests that Islam was recognized simply as one sociocultural aspect of an unknown mysterious world. Following Chinese sources, early works often regarded Prophet Muhammad, or sometimes even God, as a Buddha, and Muslims, who were called *dashi* and later *huihui*, as worshipping Heaven.[10] Major geographical works of this period do not usually employ Buddhist terms to describe Islam, except for terming the Qur'an *sūtra*(s) (Ja. *kyō*).[11]

Shuppankai, 1959, 1993), 116–46, see 134 for his ordination. Fabio Rambelli, "Muhammad Learning the Dao and Writing Sutras: Early Japanese Representations of Muhammad," in *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation*, eds. Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 296.

9 Hiromu Nagashima, "Jūnanaseiki ni okeru musurimu shōnin no nihon raikō ni tsuite," *Tōzai kaijō kōryūshi kenkyū* 1 (1989), 1–29; "Persian Muslim Merchants in Thailand and their Activities in the 17th Century: Especially on Their Visits to Japan," *Nagasaki kenritsu daigaku ronshū* 30: 3 (1997), 387–99.

10 Muhammad is also called "the local god," born in Mecca, by the medic-scholar Ryōan Terashima (years unknown) in his *Wakan sansai zue* (1712, illustrated encyclopaedia of things Japanese and Chinese). While this may simply have been a misunderstanding, it could refer to devotional worship of Muhammad. Ryōan Terashima, *Wakan wansai zue*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, Tōyōbunko, 1986), 236; Rambelli, "Muhammad Learning the Dao," 299; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 82.

11 For example, the above-mentioned Ryōan Terashima observes that Muhammad's tradition has "more than 3600 volumes of *sūtra*s divided into 30 parts" (i.e., *juzu'*, division of the Qur'an for recitation). Terashima, *Wakan sansai zue*, 391; Rambelli, "Muhammad Learning the Dao," 301. While this is a polyvalent term that can refer to Confucian classics

The use of Buddhist terminology to describe Muslim practices was most often made by those who witnessed them directly. While this is probably because they had no other way of relating to them, these cases may be considered instances of proto-parallelism, as in previously mentioned early Chinese examples (see Chapter 2), suggesting that the Japanese authors intuited comparable elements between Buddhism and Islam (Buddha and Muhammad/God), as well as Confucianism and Islam (Heaven and God), without providing systematic formulations of their 'parallels.' One example is the way in which local practices in and around the Mindanao island are described by a Japanese fisherman who spent some time in the region after suffering a shipwreck in the eighteenth century. He calls the Muslim daily prayer "worshipping West" (Ja. *haisei*),[12] and also describes the natives commemorating the day of the "Buddha"'s death.[13] Noting various practices performed by Malays at Nagasaki, Chūryō Morishima (1756?-1810?), a medical doctor-writer with expertise in *rangaku* (European studies through Dutch sources), also understood them through the lens of Buddhism. In his *Kōmō zatsuwa* (1787), he took *amin* uttered in the context of a Muslim burial to mean Amida (Buddha),[14] and *towan arara*, the expression used at the end of the "*sūtra* reading" (Ja. *kyōmon*), to refer to worshipping *arara* (Allah). He elsewhere regards this *arara* as "divine spirit" (Ja. *kijin*).[15]

The Japanese knowledge of Islam became more detailed and systematized in the eighteenth century, as more information about the outside world became available via Europeans. While not yet possessing a full grasp of the basic tenets of Islam, leading authors came to view it as a major religion alongside Christianity. Among the first to recognize this was Hakuseki Arai (1657–1725), a prominent scholar-statesman of the Tokugawa shogunate. Quoting Giovanni

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and Daoist scriptures as well as Buddhist scriptures, Hakuseki Arai, in a similar description of the Qur'an, explicitly says "Buddhist *sūtra*s" (Ja. *bukkyō*). Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 76, 273. One rare example of a passage presenting Islam through a Buddhist perspective is found in Rinsō Aochi (1775–1833)'s *Yochi shiryaku* (written 1826–7), a translation of a work by the German geographer Johann Hübner. In this work, Muslims are said to be those who "understand" (Ja. *satoru*, a Zen term to mean attaining enlightenment) that there is only one God (Ja. *tenshu*, lit., Lord of Heaven), with Muhammad his "interpreter" (Ja. *tsūji*). Rambelli, "Muhammad Learning the Dao," 304.

12 Teien Aoki, *Nankai kibun, tōkō kibun, hikozō hyōryūki* (Tokyo: Yūshōdō, 1991), 19, 64.

13 It is said to be the winter equinox: ibid., 72.

14 Chūryo Morishima, *Kōmō zatsuwa, ranwan chakuhō* (Tokyo: Kōwa Shuppan, 1980), 44–5.

15 Ibid., 88. The term *kijin* literally means "fierce god" and also refers to deities, spirits/souls of the dead, as well as beings endowed with superhuman powers. It is not certain what *towan* in *towan arara* refers to.

Battista Sidotti (1668–1714), an Italian missionary who entered Japan illegally and was captured, Hakuseki states in his *Sairan igen* (Collected Views and Strange Words, written in 1713) that Islam shares its origin with Christianity, thus understanding it as a Christian heresy. He also reports there being three types of religion in the world, namely Christianity, heathenism (or the religions of the "gentiles," a term referring to various non-European religions including Hinduism and Buddhism), and *māgometan* (Mohammedaan or Mahomedaan, in Dutch) religion, i.e., Islam.[16]

However, leading Japanese writers of this period were primarily focused on Christianity due to the growing concern for national/territorial security caused by European inroads in the country.[17] Thus their references to Islam remained minimal, with no major value judgment expressed on it or its followers.[18] And yet, one can already observe how Japanese works written toward the end of the period of national seclusion started to reflect European prejudices about Islam and Muslims, a trend that would become prevalent in the post-seclusion period.[19]

1.3 *Muslim Writings* (*from the Seventeenth Century Onward*)

Apart from early references to a legendary country producing a great amount of gold,[20] Muslims in the Middle East, just as early Japanese writers, only came to have knowledge about Japan via European sources.

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16 The tripartite presentation of the world's religions is also repeated in his *Seiyō kibun* (written 1713–25). Rambelli, "Muhammad Learning the Dao," 297, 302; James Harry Morris, "Arai Hakuseki," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 12, *Asia, Africa and the Americas* (1700–1800), eds. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 660–62, 664; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 77–8.

17 Toward the end of the Tokugawa period, Gonsai Asaka (1791–1861), a Confucian scholar serving the shogunate, states that there are four great religions in the world, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Jun'ya Shinohe, "Gendai shakai to isurāmu – Isurāmu shinto shōsūha shakai, nihon," in *Isurāmu shinkō to gendai shakai*, ed. Makoto Mizutani (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2011), 176–7.

18 Rambelli, "Muhammad Leaning the Dao," 298, 309. A universalist view is expressed by the painter-scholar Kazan Watanabe (1793–1841), who regards Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism as equally worthy of respect as they all originated in Asia and produced their sages there. Marius B. Jansen, "'*Rangaku*' and Westernization," *Modern Asian Studies* 18: 4 (1984), 551.

19 Shōgo Mitsukuri (1821–1846) describes the natives of Morocco as being "savage," adding that many of them embrace "*magome-kyō*" (i.e., Islam). Jirō Hangai, *Mitsukuri Shōgo* (Tokyo: Ōshisha, 1991), 110.

20 For one possible name for Japan, *wāqwāq*, see Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 35, 38.

One of the first Muslims to present detailed information on Japanese society and culture was the Ottoman scholar Kātip Çelebi (1609–1657), who drew on European sources, including reports of Jesuit missionaries. Mentioning the practice of supposed idolatry in the country, he enumerated the idols ranging from a Buddha (Ja. *hotoke*), who is said to be concerned with the future, to *kami*, who are concerned with the present earthly life, to Amida (Buddha), and Shaka (i.e., Śākyamuni), the biggest "idol."[21] He also pointed out that Buddhist monks held the highest status in Japan next to generals/nobles.[22]

2 The Late-Colonial Period (1854–1912)

2.1 *Late-Colonial Encounters and First Japanese Conversions to Islam*

The post-seclusion period saw more Japanese involvement with the Islamic world, especially the Ottoman Empire, although the Japanese were generally more interested in the West. The major official contacts that Japan made with Muslim-majority countries following the end of the seclusion were mostly motivated by their common plight vis-à-vis Western powers, namely the one-sided treaties it signed with Western countries. In 1872, Gen'ichirō Fukuchi (1841–1906), a leading journalist and writer, and Mokurai Shimaji (1838–1911), a Buddhist monk of the Jōdo-shin school from Nishi (West) Honganji, visited Egypt and the Ottoman Empire and investigated the Egyptian system of "mixed courts."[23]

The Japanese also took great interest in the movement of Aḥmad ʻUrābī (1841–1911) against European interventions and the Ottoman rule of Egypt.[24] A few Japanese intellectuals even visited ʻUrābī while he was living in exile in Sri Lanka.[25] A special delegation was also sent to Persia and the Ottoman

21 The work is *Cihānnümā* (after 1654, incomplete). Ibid., 169.

22 The presence of many Buddhas and the corruption of Buddhist monks in Japan are also mentioned by Louis Frois (1532–1597), a Jesuit missionary from Portugal. Kiichi Matsuda and Engerbert Jorissen, *Furoisu no nihon oboegaki: nihon to yōroppa no fūshū no chigai* (Tokyo: Chūkō Shinsho, 1983), 89f.

23 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 111f; Akira Mizuguchi, "From Ancient to Modern Times: A Retrospective of Japan's Relationship with the Middle East," *Asia-Pacific Review* 9: 2 (2002), 96–7.

24 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken,* 116; Mizuguchi, "From Ancient to Modern Times," 96.

25 The political novelist Sanshi Tōkai (1853–1922) praised the intelligence and diligence of Arabs, and expressed his sympathy for ʻUrābī in his writings. Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 119f; Sanshi Tōkai, "Kajin no kigū (excerpt)," in *Meiji seiji shōsetushū* 2, vol. 6 of *Meiji bungaku zenshū*, ed. Izumi Yanagida (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1977), 72f.

Empire in 1880–81 to discuss making treaties on the basis of shared concerns about the threat posed by Russia.[26]

The connection between the Ottoman Empire and Japan was especially strengthened by the so-called Ertuğrul incident in 1889, when a delegation to Japan led by Osman Pasha was shipwrecked on their way back home after meeting with the Emperor.[27] After donations had been collected from the Japanese, the survivors of this accident were sent back to their homeland in 1892. This event occasioned the first Japanese convert to Islam, Shōtarō Noda (1868–1904).[28]

Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 was viewed as reversing the narrative of Western superiority in the eyes of many populations across Asia and Africa, notably in such Muslim-majority societies as the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Persia, and gave them a significant impetus for Pan-Asianist mobilization and collaborations against the colonial powers.[29] This development led to an increase of Muslim visitors to Japan.[30] Rumors were also circulated in the Middle East that Japan was on the verge of embracing Islam.[31] Keen contact was established between Pan-Islamists, such as Abdürreşid Ibrahim (1857–1944) and Maulavi Mohamed Barakatullah (1859–1927), and Pan-Asianist Japanese activists. They founded, for example, the Ajia Gikai, an Asianist organization devoted to collaboration against Western imperialism and the promotion

26 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 135–6. Japan and Turkey embarked upon official relations only in 1922. Ibid., 131.

27 On the Ertuğrul incident, see Masaru Hatano, "Erutūrurugō o meguru nitto kankei," in *Kindai nihon to toruko sekai*, ed. Masaru Ikei (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1999), 45–69; Selçuk Esenbel, "Japanese Interest in the Ottoman Empire," in *Japan, Turkey and the World of Islam: The Writings of Selçuk Esenbel*, vol. 3, ed. Selçuk Esenbel (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 116–8.

28 Nobuo Misawa and Göknur Akcadag, "The First Japanese Muslim, Shôtarô Noda (1868–1904)," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 23: 1 (2007), 85–109; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 133; Takuya Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1998), 37–8; Mizuguchi, "From Ancient to Modern Times," 98.

29 See, e.g., Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan*, 10–11, 17–8, 53–63; Selçuk Esenbel, "Japan's Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945," *American Historical Review* 109: 4 (2004), 1140; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 189–90, 211–2.

30 This included some Egyptians who migrated for the purpose of learning Japanese military techniques. James Harry Morris, "Meiji kirisutokyōto to musurimu kankei," in *Kindai nihon to chūtō isurāmuken: hito mono jōhō no kōsaku kara miru*, eds. Ryōsuke Ono and Noriko Unno (Tokyo: Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengobunka Kenkyūjo, 2022), 19.

31 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 220–25; Hee-Soo Lee, *The Advent of Islam in Korea: A Historical Account* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1997), 173–8; Salih Samarrai, "History and Development of Dawa Islamiyya in Japan," (Tokyo: Islamic Center Japan, 1997).

of Islam in Japan.[32] This initiative included the first serious plan to build a mosque in Japan, and produced the first Japanese pilgrim, Mitsutarō Yamaoka (1880–1959), who traveled to Mecca with Ibrahim in 1909.[33]

2.2 *Japanese Writings of the Late-Colonial Period*

Japanese perceptions of Muslims during this period fluctuated drastically as the surrounding contemporary social and political conditions were subject to frequent change, often showing a strong influence of developments in Europe.[34] The earliest views on Islam were negative as Japanese intellectuals, including Christian thinkers,[35] were often simply regurgitating European

32 On the basis of this pledge, Japan would work with Muslims in such countries as China and Indonesia. On those Pan-Islamist activists and the Ajia Gikai, see Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 222f; Samarrai, "Dawa Islamiyya"; Esenbel, "Japan's Global Claim," 1148f; Tsutomu Sakamoto, "The First Japanese Hadji Yamaoka Kotaro and Abdürreşid Ibrahim," in *The Rising Sun and the Turkish Crescent: New Perspective on the History of Japanese-Turkish Relations*, eds. Selçuk Esenbel and Chiharu Inaba (Istanbul: Bogazici University Press, 2003), 105–21, see 114f.; Abdürreşid Ibrahim, *Japonya: isuramukei roshiajin no mita meiji nihon,* trans. Kaori Komatsu and Hisao Komatsu (Tokyo: Daisan Shokan, 1991), 361f; Nobuo Misawa, "Information about Islam in Japan in the Early Twentieth Century Contained in Daito, the Office Magazine of Ajia-Gikai: Introduction of the Basic Source about the Relations between Japan and Islamic World in the Later Meiji Era," *Ajia afurika bunka kenkyūjo nenpō* 36 (2001), 60–75.

33 On Ibrahim and his trip with Yamaoka, see Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan*, 63–78. Yamaoka converted to Islam on his way to Mecca in 1902 and is often regarded as a "bogus Muslim" who only converted for political purposes: Nobuo Misawa, "Shintoism and Islam in Interwar Japan: How did the Japanese Come to Believe in Islam?" *Orient* 46 (2011), 123; Ulrich Brandenburg, "Imagining an Islamic Japan: Pan-Asianism's Encounter with Muslim Mission," *Japan Forum* 32: 2 (2020), 178; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 152–3. Regardless of his initial motivation for conversion, Yamaoka seems to have developed a strong commitment to Islam: see below for his view of Islam.

34 The works of Arabic and Persian literature enjoyed quite some popularity. The *1001 Nights* (*Arabian Nights*) was first translated into Japanese (from English) in 1875. The poetry of Omar Khayyām (1048–1131) was also introduced through an English translation in 1908 and received much attention from Japanese readers. This is probably because of the similarity to the Buddhist worldview of the sense of impermanence of things in the world expressed in this work. Omar Khayyām, *Rubaiyāto*, trans. Ryōsaku Ogawa (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1949), 145f; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 160–1.

35 While there were only a few dozen Muslims living in Japan at this time, mostly Indians of a Shi'a background in Yokohama, Christianity was propagated widely, especially by Protestant missionaries hostile to Islam. Brandenburg, "Imagining an Islamic Japan," 173; Ibrahim, *Japonya,* 177–8. Later views of Japanese Christians are often multi-layered, reflecting both Western influences and their growing self-identity as Japanese/Asian. For example, Kanzō Uchimura (1861–1930), while being highly critical of some aspects of Islam, emphasizes that all major religions of the world originated in Asia, pointing out their commonalities. Morris, "Meiji kirisutokyōto to musurimu kankei," 30–33; James

prejudices.[36] Then a sympathetic view was expressed briefly when the Japanese regarded Muslims in the Middle East as fellow Asians struggling under European hegemony.[37] While this positive stance toward Islam generally continued for the rest of this period, notably among Pan-Asianist thinkers who are critical of Western imperialism, some Japanese intellectuals came to take a negative attitude toward Islam, this time from a colonialist perspective, as the Japanese sought to be equal to the Europeans.[38]

The sudden increase in Islam's political relevance in the eyes of the Japanese led to a growth in academic publications about Islam toward the end of the Meiji era, especially on areas such as China and Turkey.[39] Many Japanese intellectuals also expressed enthusiastic interest in Prophet Muhammad as a result of developments in Europe, seeming to herald the surge in Japanese involvement with Islam that took place during the following period.

As in the early-to-modern period, only those who had direct experience of Islam (this time through trips to the Middle East) employed Buddhist terms extensively in their descriptions of Islam. This may have derived partly from the lack of information and/or proper vocabulary to explain its various aspects. For example, a member of the first Japanese delegation sent out to Europe

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Harry Morris, "Kanzō Uchimura," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 16, *North America, South-East Asia, China, Japan and Australasia* (*1800–1914*), eds. David Thomas and John A. Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 738–59.

36 See, e.g., Yukichi Fukuzawa, "Shōchū bankoku ichiran" and "Sekai kunizukushi," in *Fukuzawa Yukichi senshū* 2, eds. Masafumi Tomita and Shun'ichi Tsuchihashi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1981), 101, 106, and 182–3 respectively. A similar worldview is found in Masao Uchida, *Yochi shiryaku*, vol. 3 ([Tokyo]: [s.n.], 1874–75); 86–93; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 97–100.

37 On the other hand, Tateki Tani (1837–1911), the first minister of agriculture and commerce (1885–1887), who met 'Urābī, argues that it was thanks to its adherence to Islam that the Ottoman Empire had survived the challenge of European imperialism: Tateki Tani, *Tani Kanjō ikō*, ed. Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1976), 607.

38 Some writers attributed the perceived backwardness of the Middle East, and its increasing subjection to European dominance, to Islam. For example, the Christian writer Roka Tokutomi (1868–1927) declares that "the time of Muhammad is long gone and the Muslim countries will definitely perish unless they get rid of Muhammad": Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 152; Roka Tokutomi and Aiko Tokutomi, "Nihon kara nihon e 1," in *Roka zenshū* 12 (Tokyo: Roka Zenshū Kankōkai, 1929), 285; "Nihon kara nihon e 2," in *Roka zenshū* 13 (Tokyo: Roka Zenshū Kankōkai, 1929), 42.

39 Islam was called most commonly *huihuikyō* or *kaikyō*. The latter is a Japanese reading of the Chinese term *huijiao* (the teaching of the *hui*) for Islam. These nomenclatures, alongside *mahometto* for Prophet Muhammad, continued to be used until the twentieth century. The Qur'an, in contrast, was (and to a large extent still is) transliterated more or less faithfully as *kōran*. More exact transliterations such as *isurāmu*, *muhanmado*, and *kuruān* are being used by more contemporary writers: see next chapter.

before the Meiji Restoration in 1862 noted, when visiting the Muhammad Ali Mosque in Cairo, a "Buddha statue" located in the back of the hall, perhaps referring to the *miḥrāb*. He also mentioned undecipherable "Sanskrit" writings in a golden frame, and that seated people were "*sūtra*-chanting," quite in the style of Buddhist chanting found in Japan.[40] Similarly assuming the *miḥrāb* to contain a Buddha statue, another member noted that the people seated "in front of the Buddha" were "chanting the name of the Buddha," either keeping their palms together or prostrating.[41] Some of the descriptions indicate the author's conscious attempts to relate to Islam from a Buddhist perspective, thereby constituting a form of proto-parallelism. This possibility is supported by the fact that at least some members of the delegation were aware of Islam being other than Buddhism and that they depicted Muslim practices, especially those observed in the mosque, with some respect.[42]

Elsewhere, discussing Islam as practiced in Persia, Masaharu Yoshida (1851–1921, leader of the above-mentioned delegation to Persia) observed that the two major sects in Islam, Shi'a and Sunni (which he mistakenly associated with Turkey and Persia respectively), were at loggerheads with each other, similarly to "followers of Hokke and Monto" (i.e., the Nichiren and Jōdo-shin schools).[43]

Islam was also understood in the framework of Japanese spirituality by the first Japanese pilgrim to Mecca, Mitsutarō Yamaoka,[44] who did not have much knowledge of Islam or sympathy for Muslims at the time of his journey.[45] While

40 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 145; Sukehiro Takashima, *Ōseikōki* 7 ([s.l.]: Seikyūdō, 1867), 2u-30. A mosque is also called a "Buddha hall" (Ja. *butsudō*) in Seiryū Ichikawa, *Obae ōkō manroku*, ed. and trans. Shigetoshi Kusuya (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, 1992), 55.

41 Shunjirō Mashizu, "*Ōkōki*," in *Kengai shisetsu nikki hensan*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1930), 163–4, quoted in Kenji Kuroda, "Bakumatsu nihon no isurāmu hakken: bunkyū ken'ō shisetsudan no kijutsu yori," in *Kindai nihon to chūtō isurāmuken: hito mono jōhō no kōsaku kara miru*, eds. Ryōsuke Ono and Noriko Unno (Tokyo: Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengobunka Kenkyūjo, 2022), 63.

42 Kuroda, "Bakumatsu nihon no isurāmu hakken," 62–6.

43 Masaharu Yoshida, *Kaikyō tanken: perusha no tabi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1991), 192–3. Members of Ōtani missions, a series of expeditions (1902–14 on three occasions) undertaken by a group of Buddhists of the Jōdo-shin Ōtani sect to investigate the history of early Buddhism, do not compare Muslim (*mahometto*) practices they encountered in Central Asia with those of Buddhists. Kōzui Ōtani et al., *Shirukurōdo tanken* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1979). This is perhaps because, as Buddhist monks and specialists, they had a much clearer sense of distinction between the two traditions.

44 The present analysis categorizes the first work of Yamaoka as Japanese rather than Muslim, as it mostly describes Islam from the perspective of an outsider.

45 Tazawa, M*usurimu nippon*, 56; Mitsutarō Yamaoka, *Meiji Sirukurōdo tanken kikōbun shūsei* 22 *Arabiya jūdanki* (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 1912, 1988), 76, 130. It has also been suggested that Yamaoka may not have properly carried out the pilgrimage. Sakamoto, "The First Japanese Hadji," 117.

he recognizes Mecca, "the capital of Arabia," as the divine court (Ja. *shinpu*) of Allah, where Muhammad received "divine revelation,"[46] Yamaoka's view of Islam was markedly influenced by Shinto. Struggling to figure out the Muslim object of worship, he first suspected that Muslims, who revere the black stone of Ka'bah, may be "stone-worshippers," despite being aware that there was nothing to represent divinity there.[47] This Japanese pilgrim, upon asking where the physical representation of God (Ja. *goshintai*) was located,[48] was told by his Muslim host that God as the creator of the universe does not have the Trinity or idols attached to Him.[49] Realizing that Islam regards divinities in other religions as different names of God, all sharing the one truth,[50] Yamaoka concluded that the phrase "*allāhu akbar* (God is great) means Amaterasu-ōmikami" and that the object of Muslim worship is nothing but this ultimate ancestor of the Imperial family.[51] Admitting that his theory is unusual and even blasphemous (Ja. *fukei*), Yamaoka declared, in much the same way as many Pan-Asianist writers did,[52] that it is the duty of the Japanese to spread Shinto to edify West Asians, who "are behind Japan by thirteen centuries in coming to worship this divinity."[53]

In contrast to the rather unsympathetic and deficient understanding of the Muslim tradition of the previous period, a remarkable amount of positive attention was paid to Prophet Muhammad by Japanese writers from the early twentieth century. They followed Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)'s *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841),[54] which denounced the negative view of the Prophet that was widespread in the Christian world and attempted to shed a more favorable light on Islam by re-evaluating various aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life.

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46 Yamaoka, *Arabiya jūdanki*, 114.

47 Ibid., 126–7.

48 Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon,* 57; Yamaoka, *Arabiya jūdanki*, 136. See the next section for Yamaoka's later view.

49 Yamaoka, *Arabiya jūdanki*, 132–3.

50 Ibid., 134.

51 Amaterasu-ōmikami (the great *kami* Amaterasu) is a major mythological figure considered as a symbol of the sun and as the ancestor of the Imperial family.

52 Yet he did not seem to have been a conscious Pan-Asianism activist. Tsutomu Sakamoto, "Yamaoka Kōtarō no mekka junrei to Abudurureshito Iburahimu," in *Kindai nihon to toruko sekai*, ed. Masaru Ikei (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1999), 158–217. For more Japanese views of Islam in relation to Shinto, see below.

53 Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon*, 57; Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 156; Yamaoka, *Arabiya jūdanki*, 144–5.

54 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 149.

Re-interpretations of the traditional Christian view of Islam in the Japanese works on Muhammad[55] are most notable in the way they accorded a positive meaning to the militant aspect of his life and the concept of Islam being spread 'by the sword.'[56] For example, Reishū Sakamoto (aka Ken'ichi Sakamoto, years unknown) uses this idea, which was originally a piece of Christian propaganda against Islam, to emphasize Muhammad's revolutionarily heroic character.[57] Kaiten Nukariya (1867–1934),[58] a Sōtō Zen monk-scholar with substantial experience in both Europe and the USA, also appreciated the multi-faceted nature of Muhammad's life, full of earthly features such as military activities and commitment to his family. He contrasted it with the secluded religious life of the historical Buddha and the Christ, as practical/realistic versus idealistic.[59] What is notable is that Nukariya initially gave a negative assessment of the politico-military leadership of Muhammad in the period subsequent to the *hijrah* i.e., his community's migration from Mecca to Medina. However, he came to appreciate this type of leadership as the nationalist sentiment grew after Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, recognizing parallels between Muhammad's mission to create a united Arab nation and Japan's imperialist agenda.[60]

A more straightforward expression of Buddhist interest in the active political aspects of the Prophet's life that was motivated by the political circumstances of the period is found in *Mahometto no sensōshugi* (The Militarism of Muhammad, 1903) by Hannosuke Ikemoto (years unknown).[61] In this provocatively titled work, Ikemoto recognizes the relevance of the Prophet's life for

55 Japanese writers of the imperialist period more consciously reconsidered traditional European views of Islam. See below.

56 For more on how Japanese biographies of Muhammad from this period compare with the Western ones, whose biases they wished to rectify, see Mikiya Koyagi, "An Eastern Hero: Biographies of Muhammad in Imperial Japan" *Modern Asian Studies* (2023), 1–18.

57 Ken'ichi Sakamoto, *Muhametto* ([s.l.]: [s.n.], 1899), 2; Reiko Ōkawa, *Seiten Kuruān no shisō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004), 191–2. Sugita does not note this sense of an interpretative turnaround, instead regarding it simply as a continuation of the traditional Christian view. Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 150–51.

58 His willingness to rectify the European prejudice toward Islam is clear, for example, in Kaiten Nukariya, *Kaiketsu Mahometto* (Tokyo: Ireidō, 1905), Introduction, 3; Kaiten Nukariya, "Mahometto ryakuden, 1," *Shinbukkyō* 6: 4 (1905), 286; Ryūshin Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2002), 43f.

59 Kaiten Nukariya, "Mahometto, kirisuto, budda," *Shinbukkyō* 6: 3 (1905), 263; Kaiten Nukariya, *Uchū bikan* (Tokyo: Bunsendō, 1910), 308, 312.

60 Koyagi, "An Eastern Hero," 11–2.

61 His aim was to describe the life and career of Muhammad in accordance with the Qur'an, and to "warn present society of the need for aggression." Hannosuke Ikemoto, *Mahometto no sensōshugi* (Tokyo: Haruyamabō, 1903), Introduction, 1.

the Pan-Asianist agenda emerging in the country, encouraging the Japanese in active fight against European powers.[62] He compared the Prophet directly with Nichiren (1222–1282), founder of the Nichiren school of Japanese Buddhism, whose teachings were focused on effecting change in the present world and whose style of proselytization was highly assertive.[63] In doing so, Ikemoto employs the term *shakubuku*, an edificational Buddhist concept of fighting and conquering negative ideas (or even people) emphasized by Nichiren. In the main text of the book, instead of *sensō* (war), Ikemoto highlights the rebellious, passionate, and revolutionary character common to both Muhammad and Nichiren as reformers within the religious landscape of their times.[64] According to him, both men "came from heaven," in response to the need of remedy for the degenerate tendencies in society.[65]

2.3 *Muslim Writings of the Late-Colonial Period*

In contrast to the generally cold portrayal of Islam by Japanese authors, many Muslim writers from the modern period express a passionate admiration for Japan. Motivated by a shared sense of political ambition, they often emphasize cultural affinities between the Japanese and Muslims.

Japan was discussed with much zeal in the Ottoman Empire early in the period following the Ertuğrul incident, often through European sources.[66] It was also featured in Persian works of history[67] and travelogues alike. For example, Ebrāhīm Şaḥḥāfbāshī (years unknown), who traveled to Japan in 1897, regarded some Japanese customs as similar to those of Muslims (or, more

62 Ōkawa, *Kuruān no shisō*, 195.

63 Although Ikemoto also wrote about Nichiren elsewhere, he was probably not a Nichiren follower himself. Yōrokuan Ikemoto, *Eiyūsō Nichiren* (Tokyo: Bungaku Dōshikai, 1905), 9. His interest in Nichiren seems to have derived from his general admiration for aggressive and 'heroic' religious figures, which reflects the influence of Carlyle's work as well as the popularity of Nichirenism at this time. Nichirenism was a political movement based on modern interpretations of Nichiren's teachings. In the context of growing Japanese imperialism, Nichiren's idea of Japan's mission to establish true Buddhism (i.e., his version of Buddhism focused on the worship of the Lotus Sutra) for the survival of Japan and the entire (Buddhist) world converged with Meiji Japan's expansionist agenda, justified by what was seen as the imperative to save Asia from Western imperialism. Koyagi, "An Eastern Hero," 13–4.

64 Ikemoto, *Sensō shugi*, 36–7.

65 Ibid., 46, 76.

66 For Turkish works on Japan from this period, see Oğuz Karakartal, "1911–1914 nen no torukobungaku ni mirareru nihonjinzō to nihonmoderu," trans. Yumi Ishimaru, *Nihon chūtō gakkai nenpō* 6 (1991), 115–6.

67 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 171–2.

specifically, Iranians). He particularly mentioned the performance of *dhikr* (perhaps referring to daily *sūtra*-chanting) three times a day at a small prayer space in a home.[68]

The tendency to idolize Japan is seen most clearly in post-Russo-Japanese-War writings.[69] Many Egyptian writers attributed Japanese success to their ability to actively embrace modernity while maintaining their traditional values.[70] However, such writers did not normally pay much attention to religion per se, preferring to focus on the mentality and culture of the Japanese when analyzing their achievements in terms of practical progress.

Another notable tendency among Muslim writers from this period is to overlook potential problems in Japanese religiosity, such as idolatry and the divinized status of the Emperor at the time. This can be attributed to the sense of solidarity that Muslims in the Middle East felt with the Japanese. In describing Japan, these Muslim writers employed the idea of polytheism and considered the Buddha the main Japanese 'idol,' on a par with that of the Emperor. Shunning religious polemics, also due to their scant knowledge of Japanese religions, they used these ideas as convenient cultural symbolism with which to present Japan to their audiences.

Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1872–1932),[71] for example, was so focused on the Japanese victory led by the Emperor that he spoke of the Japanese giving an oath on their numerous idols (Ar. *awthān*) before fighting the Russians, without problematizing the possible idolatry. The poet also wished the "mercy of God" on the land of Japan.[72] This implies that the perceived polytheistic tendencies of the Japanese would not stop them from being favored by God. However, it is also possible that the expression could refer to the expectation of Japan's conversion to Islam.

68 Ibid., 175.

69 The famous Egyptian author and activist Muṣṭafā Kāmil (1874–1908) was the first to write a eulogy of Japan following the Russo-Japanese War in *al-Shams al-Mushriqah* (The Rising Sun) (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-Liwā', 1904), based on European accounts of Japan. Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 191f.

70 The Pan-Islamist leader Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897) saw religion in Japan as "neutralized," hence not interfering with the country's development. Mona Abaza, "Japan as Imagined by Arabs," *International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter* 27 (March 2002), 19.

71 His "Ghāda al-Yābān" (The Virgin of Japan, 1904), which eulogizes the Emperor and the Japanese, was highly popular in Egypt and was later included in school textbooks in Egypt and Lebanon. Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 203.

72 Ibid., 204–6.

Though aware that none of the rumors about Japanese conversion were true,[73] Abdürreşid Ibrahim also viewed the Japanese highly favorably, sometimes playing down the seriousness of theological problems potentially arising from their religious practices. He observed that Japanese moral values meet an Islamic standard almost ideally. Examples include cleanliness, politeness, generosity, conjugal fidelity, and strong pride in ethnicity. The latter, observed Ibrahim, would be better secured with Islam than Buddhism.[74]

Ibrahim was particularly concerned with perceived Japanese idolatrous tendencies and the practice of cremation. He regarded the (Lamaist) Buddhism of Tibet as virtually monotheistic, but Japanese Buddhism as easily ascribing divinity to those who have worked miracles, including the Emperor. Yet, he did not directly problematize the divinity of the Emperor, but accepted the greatness (hence divinity) of the Imperial family as it had "existed continuously for 2,569 years."[75] Furthermore, Ibrahim believes that the Japanese will soon outgrow idolatry,[76] suspecting also that Buddhism was once a noble religion in Islamic terms and before changing over time.[77] He speculated that there may have been a prophet in the long history of Japan, although he admits that no Muslim sources shed light on who that Buddhist prophet might be.[78] This suggests that Ibrahim worked with the *dīn al-fiṭrah* theory, which implies that Buddhism initially contained the message of *islām* but later degenerated into idolatry.[79]

The view that Buddhism, seen as the main religious tradition of Japan, is somewhat related to Islam is also found in other Pan-Islamist writers, some of whom could have read Ibrahim's work. Mehmet Akif (1873–1936), a prominent Turkish poet, argued that the spirit of the Japanese is nothing but Islam "which happens to have taken the form of a Buddha." Thus regarding Buddhism as (the Japanese version of) Islam, Akif also employs a flexible attitude to non-Islamic aspects of Japanese religiosity, arguing that the only thing lacking in Japanese moral values is the belief in the one and only God.[80]

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73 Ibrahim, *Japonya*, 149.
74 Ibid., 394.
75 Ibid., 132.
76 Ibid., 227.
77 Ibid., 249.
78 Ibid., 154–5.
79 Ibrahim's interest in a more doctrinal interpretation of Buddhism may stem from his background as an *imam* as well as his direct contact with Buddhists.
80 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 229–31.

3 The Imperialist Period (1912–1945)

3.1 *Encounters during the Imperialist Period*

The Japanese involvement with Muslims increased dramatically in the imperialist period (1912–1945)[81] also due to an ongoing influx of Muslim émigrés. Thanks to the interest shared by Japanese Pan-Asianists and Pan-Islamist Muslims, on the one hand, *da'wah* activities were conducted with much zeal; while on the other hand, various research institutions were set up in Japan to study Muslim-majority countries and regions, especially after the Manchurian state was founded in 1932.[82]

Many of the newly arrived Muslim activists had Pan-Islamic ambitions and a hope (in collaboration with the Japanese) to contain Russia's power. Some Central Asian Muslims also fled the Soviet oppression after the 1917 Revolution and settled in Japan.[83] Those who contributed to the expansion of the Muslim community in the country include Mehmet Abdülhay Kurbanali (aka Muhammed Gabdulkhay Kurbangaliev, 1892–1972)[84] and Ayaz Ishaki (1878–1954).[85] It was Abdürreşid Ibrahim who eventually led the Muslim community in Tokyo and actively propagated (e.g., among Indonesians) the Japanese cause, promoting active resistance against Western powers.[86] The activities of those Muslims were often supported by Japanese converts to Islam,[87]

81 Major Buddhist establishments in Japan supported the country's imperialist agenda: see, for example, Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009). As shown below, their support of national policies often entailed a sympathetic interest in Islam.

82 Shirō Nohara, "Kaikyōkenkyū no yakuwari," in his *Ajia no rekishi to shisō* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1966), 164.

83 See Esenbel, "Japan's Global Claim," 1156f. Tatar Muslims established communities in Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe, and Kumamoto, providing more opportunities for the Japanese to encounter Muslims. Akira Matsunaga, "Tōkyō kaikyō danchō Kurubangarī no tsuihō to isurāmu seisaku no tenkai," in *Nicchūsensō to isurāmu*, ed. Tsutomu Sakamoto (Tokyo: Keiōgijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2008), 184–5.

84 Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi,* 295–6; Esenbel, "Japan's Global Claim," 1157; Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon*, 84f; Tsutomu Sakamoto, "Tōkyō mosuku enkakushi," *Ajia yūgaku* 30 (2001), 126; Sankei Shinbun, "Mosuku o tateta bōmei tatārujin," 6 parts, (10–15 March 2002) <http://islam3.hp.infoseek.co.jp/column/kurban1.htm> [accessed 4 February 2008].

85 Akira Matsunaga, "Ayazu Isuhakī to kyokutō no tatārujin komyunitī," in *Kindai nihon to toruko sekai*, ed. Masaru Ikei (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1999), 219–63.

86 Esenbel, "Japan's Global Claim," 1167.

87 For a list of the Japanese pilgrims to Mecca during this period, see Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi*, Appendix.

many of whom had extensive experience in China or Russia.[88]

Increased *da'wah* efforts also led to the establishment of the first proper mosques in Japan.[89] The Kobe Mosque was built in 1935, mainly through contributions from Muslim Indian merchants in the city. It is still in use today. The Tokyo Mosque, which was opened in 1938, became the centerpiece of wartime Japanese-Muslim engagements.[90]

Research organizations established as part of Japan's *kaikyō seisaku* (Islam policy) around this time include Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo (Institute of Islamic Studies) and Dainippon Kaikyō Kyōkai (Greater Japan Islamic League), both officially set up in 1938. Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo, a research institution headed by Kōji Ōkubo (1887–1947), had on board a Japanese scholar of the caliber of Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993, see next chapter).[91] Dainippon Kaikyō Kyōkai was an official Islamic organization dedicated to promoting Islamic studies and Japanese-Muslim relations. It was led by major military figures such as Senjūrō Hayashi (1876–1943), the first president, who led the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.[92]

As the war progressed, Japanese authorities extended the sphere of their Islam policy into Southeast Asia, where they forced the participation of the local people under the banner of "The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere," particularly in Indonesia and Malaya.[93] For example, the war was propagated as a holy war (*jihād*), with Japan presented as the protector of Islam, to

88 For their central role in Japan's Islam policies, see Sakamoto, "Yamaoka Kōtarō," 160f; Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon*, 54. They are sometimes defined as Japan's Muslim "agents": Esenbel, "Japan's Global Claim,"1149.

89 Not much is known about the Nagoya Mosque, which was built in 1931 but burned down during the war in 1945. Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi*, 302–3; Keiko Sakurai, *Nihon no musurimu shakai* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2003) 200f.

90 The ideology behind the opening of the Tokyo Mosque was more nationalist than Islamic: Ibrahim, *Japonya*, 362–3; Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon*, 73f; Sakamoto, "Tokyo mosuku enkakushi."

91 Shirō Nohara, "Kaikyōken kenkyūjo no omoide," in his *Ajia no rekishi to shisō* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1966), 224–5; Eri Tamura, "Kaikyōken kenkyūjo o megutte: sono hito to jidai," *Gakushūin shigaku* 25 (1987), 16–35; Hirotsugu Ōsawa, "Shōwazenki ni okeru isurāmu kenkyū: kaikyōken kenkyūjo to Ōkubo Kōji," *Shūkyō kenkyū* 341 (2004), 493–516.

92 Hirofumi Tanaka, "Islamic Studies in Wartime Japan: An Analysis of Historical Materials of the Greater Japan Muslim League," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 23: 2 (2007), 215–36.

93 In those areas, Muslims were generally treated more favorably than ethnic Chinese. Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan, 1982, 1988), 248–51; Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 248; Wang Gungwu, *Sino-Malay Encounters* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2001), 124.

garner support from Malay Muslims.[94] On a more practical level, the Japanese authorities were not completely unaware of the local customs; to improve relations, they made efforts to instruct Japanese personnel on the practices of local Muslims, such as their aversion to dogs and pigs, and recommended behavioral adjustments like refraining from using the left hand and from getting drunk in the presence of Muslims.[95] However, some of their policies proved highly problematic, most notably that of Emperor worship (Ja. *kyūjō yōhai*).[96]

3.2 *Japanese Writings on Islam from the Imperialist Period*

Due to the country's interest in political collaboration with Muslims in various parts of Asia, and in ruling them, the Islam-related literature from this period was more comprehensive.[97] It paid more attention to details of Islamic beliefs and practices as well as their regional variations. The appearance of such general works on Islam clearly expressed the political relevance that it had acquired for Japan.[98] Unsurprisingly, the writers from this period were generally sympathetic to Islam. They were also very keen to go beyond Western interpretations of Islam and establish their own tradition of Islamic studies.[99] Long-standing negative views of Islam addressed in these works include it having been spread

94 As part of the Japanese effort to manipulate the local Muslim elite for propaganda purposes, similarities between Islam and Shinto (or the Japanese spirit) were also emphasized. Abu Talib Ahmad, *The Malay Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941–45* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2003), 214, 218–20, 228–9.

95 These instructions were produced with the help of Japanese Muslim activists, some of whom fought with the locals for their independence. Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon*, 152–7.

96 Aiko Kurasawa, "'Daiotōa' sensōki no taiisurāmu seisaku," in *Nicchūsensō to isuāmu: manmō ajia chiiki ni okeru tōchi kaijū seisaku*, eds. Tsutomu Sakamoto (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2008), 249, 260, 274–5. Ahmad, *The Malay Muslims*, 54, 59; Aiko Kurasawa, *Daitōasensō o shitte imasuka* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2002), 69, 170f; Yutaka Katō, *Daitōasensō to indoneshia* (Tokyo: Shuchōsha, 2002), 98; Shizuo Saitō, *Watashi no gunseiki: indoneshia dokuritsu zen'ya* (Tokyo: Jawa Gunseiki Kankōkai, 1977), 44.

97 Works on Muhammad were also published, showing continuing appreciation of his energetic and earthly character: e.g., Akira Nakashōji, *Sabaku no hikari* (Tokyo: Shinkōsha, 1922); and Yoshirō Kuchimura, *Yasei Mahometto* (Tokyo: Uedaya, 1923).

98 Nakaba Wakabayashi, *Kaikyōsekai to nippon* (Tokyo: [s.n.], 1937), 1; Kame Segawa, *Kaikyōto* (Tokyo: Nanyō Kyōkai, 1918), 1.

99 Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo, *Gaikan kaikyōken* (Tokyo: Seibundō Shinkōsha, 1942), 1. Ōkubo was not happy with the political agenda behind the promotion of Islamic studies at that time: Nohara, "Kaikyōken kenkyūjo no omoide," 225. See also Cemil Aydin, "Overcoming Eurocentrism? Japan's Islamic Studies during the Era of the Greater East Asia War (1937–45)," in *The Islamic Middle East and Japan: Perceptions, Aspirations, and the Birth of Intra-Asian Modernity*, ed. Renée Worringer (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), 137–62.

'by the sword'[100] and its alleged oppression of women.[101] Their publication also led to the first Japanese translations of the Qur'an, although only a few writers were proficient in Arabic.[102] While the traditional name *kaikyō* and its variations were still used, many writers also mentioned the original term Islam, noting that it is not the religion of Muhammad.[103]

Perhaps as part of their efforts to support their nation's political agenda, some Japanese scholars argue that Islamic teachings of monotheism do not impinge upon the Shinto worldview.[104] Masao Hara (years unknown) was an authority on Shinto and also well versed in Christianity.[105] His work *Nipponseishin to kaikyō* (Japanese spirituality and Islam), published in 1941, was commissioned by Dainippon Kaikyō Kyōkai. Written in response to the Religious Organizations Law (Ja. *shūkyō dantai hō*, 1939), which officially allowed Islam to be propagated in Japan,[106] it examines how the Japanese should understand Islam and deal with Muslims, given the increasing focus on the Islam policy within the context of state Shinto (Ja. *kokka shintō*).[107] Following this political motive,

100 Shūmei Ōkawa, *Kaikyō gairon* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1942, 1992), 10–11; Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo, *Gaikan kaikyōken*, 15.

101 Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 167–8; Kōji Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," in *Gendai kaikyōken*, by Kōji Ōkubo and Hajime Kobayashi (Tokyo: Shikai Shobō, 1936), 100.

102 Only one of the first four attempts made at the task, that of Ōkubo (in the *Kōran kenkyū*, 1950, incomplete), was a direct translation from Arabic. Other translations were by Sakamoto (1920), Takahashi and Ariga (1938), and Ōkawa (1950). The first complete Japanese translation from Arabic was by Izutsu (1957–8). For a list of direct translations, see next chapter.

103 Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 81; Akio Kasama, *Kaikyōto* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1939), Ch. 1; Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 47–8: Ōkawa, *Kaikyō gairon*, 120. Prior to this period, Islam was often called *mahomettokyō*, likely copying the derogatory European nomenclature of Mohammedanism.

104 As most Japanese writers from this period relate Shinto with Islam to some degree, the categorization is based on whether their focus is on Shinto or Buddhism.

105 He also wrote about Shinto, arguing for its importance as the tradition behind the contemporary nationalist ideology. Masao Hara, *Genshi nippon no densetsu* (Tokyo: Seibi Shokaku, 1944).

106 Islam was not included among the officially recognized religions under this law, but was accepted as one of the "other religions." Masao Hara, *Nipponseishin to kaikyō* (Tokyo: Dainippon Kaikyō Kyōkai 1941), 3; Shinohe, "Gendai shakai to isurāmu," 170–71, 191–2, 205–6. For more, see, e.g., Yoshiaki Fukuda, "Senchūki ni okeru kokunai musurimu dantai no tōsei to 'kaikyō kōnin mondai': zai kōbe musurimu komyunitī no shiten kara," *Ajiabunka kenkyūjo kenkyū nenpō* 47 (2012), 156–75.

107 State Shinto refers to the nationally sanctioned religious system adopted by the Meiji government and continued until the end of WWII. It centered around the veneration of Amaterasu-ōmikami, the ancestral deity of the Imperial family, and thus constituted the basis for the Emperor-centered ideology. See also below.

Hara's stance toward Islam is highly pragmatic and optimistic.[108] He holds that although the monotheistic teaching of Islam is doctrinally incompatible with the traditional Japanese belief involving "eight million *kami*" (Ja. *yaoyorozu no kami*, denoting an infinite number), this needs to be accepted if Japan is to allow Muslims to live within its borders.[109] He also argued that the nature of Allah is different from that of Amaterasu-ōmikami[110] on the grounds that the God of the universe and the God of creation are separate in the Japanese tradition.[111] While admitting that the strictly monotheistic nature of Islam potentially clashes with the Japanese worship of the Emperor as divine,[112] he observed that Islam does not impinge on Japanese spirituality unless the term Allah is translated mistakenly as *kami*.[113]

Arguing that the Japanese do not worship idols but the law of the universe through artifacts such as statues,[114] this Shinto expert also maintained that Japanese spirituality, which is "immutable" and embodies "fundamental principles of human life," can "correct the derivative aspects of Islam," which has "incorporated"[115] various spiritual and cultural traditions.[116] Hara also maintained that the concept found in Japanese spirituality of "many gods as one and one as many" is absent in Islam, arguing that this notion is "one level higher" than the simple focus on the one and only Allah.[117]

In arguing that the spirituality and culture of Shinto are immutable, while the Islamic tradition is somehow corrupted and tainted by foreign elements, Hara ignored two issues. The first is the history of mutual influence between Buddhism and the indigenous tradition of Japan, which eventually came to be called Shinto. The other is the way the teaching of Islam has maintained a relative universality despite the vast geographical areas where it has spread. He also failed to note that the concept of "one as many and many as one" is also important in Islam, especially in its mystical strands.[118]

But given the nation's (hence Hara's) aim to show how Japan can provide a spiritual basis for all Asians, it is also possible that he needed to ignore

108 Shinohe, "Gendai shakai to isurāmu," 202–3.
109 Hara, *Nipponseishin to kaikyō*, 98.
110 Ibid., 250.
111 Ibid., 253.
112 Ibid., 169.
113 Ibid., 256–8, 264–9.
114 Ibid., 324–5.
115 Ibid., 190–91, 299, 308.
116 Ibid., 300.
117 Ibid., 317.
118 See, for example, Khatami, "Bunmeikan no taiwa," 125.

similarities between Shinto and Islam on the level of the highest deity, so that the uniqueness and absolute centrality of Amaterasu would be upheld. Hara's determination to categorically differentiate Allah and Amaterasu, compared with the identification of the two that Yamaoka made earlier, seems to suggest that the notion of the spiritual superiority of the Japanese had been brought to the foreground more ostensibly as the war progressed.

While the Japanese spirituality of the time was mainly represented in terms of Shinto,[119] or Emperor worship, Buddhist terminology was used more prevalently to describe Islamic concepts in both Japanese works on Islam and translations of the Qur'an.[120] Examples include such practice-related terms as *jiin* (temple, for mosque),[121] *gongyō* (for practice or spiritual training),[122] *kyōten* or *kyōmon* (*sūtra*s, for the holy scripture),[123] *kisha* (almsgiving, for *zakāt*),[124] *fuse* (offering, for *ṣadaqah*),[125] *daimoku* (the name of the Lotus Sutra to be chanted, for *takbīr*, i.e., *allāhu akbar*),[126] *shōmyō* (chanting the name of the Buddha, for *dhikr*),[127] as well as more doctrinal expressions like *jōdo* or *gokuraku* (the Pure Land, for paradise),[128] *kōmyō* (light, Ar. *nūr*),[129] *jihi* (compassion, or *ji* and *hi* separately, for Arabic words of the triliteral root *ra-ḥa-ma*, indicating mercy),[130] and *kie* (taking refuge, for surrender).[131]

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119 For example, *saikai* (referring to abstinence and purification undertaken before a Shinto ritual for fasting). Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 84.

120 Despite the avowed anti-Western and anti-Christian stance of many of the Japanese commentators on Islam during this period, the Japanese translations of the Qur'an also show strong Christian influences. Krämer, "Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents," 621, 634–7.

121 Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 145; Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 86, 89; Kanshi Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," in *Gaikan kaikyōken*, ed. Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo (Tokyo: Seibundō Shinkōsha, 1942),32, 48.

122 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 64.

123 Ibid.; Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 148; Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 19.

124 Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 163; Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 64, 94; Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 46.

125 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 94; Kōji Ōkubo, "Isuramukyō," in *Kōran kenkyū*, by Kōji Ōkubo and Kanshi Kagamishima (Tokyo: Tōkōshoin, 1950), 3.

126 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 69; Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 30.

127 Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 30; Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 69. *Shōmyō* is to chant the name of the Buddha and is identical to *nenbutsu.*

128 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 74f.

129 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 76; Sakamoto, *Kōrankyō*, 2 vols (Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Zenshū Kankōkai, 1920), 2: 34; Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 28.

130 Sakamoto, *Kōrankyō*, 1: 1, 247; Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 65f, 77; Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 17, 29–30.

131 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 48; Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 12, 14. In contrast, Segawa uses more neutral words, such as *shugyō*, instead of *gongyō*; and *fukujū*, instead of *kie*. Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 82, 138. On the use of the term *kie* to describe Islam, see Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 81–2. Some writers present Islamic practice as consisting of "four pillars of

Even Japanese terms for *nirvāṇa* were employed to describe the Islamic tradition. *Nyūmetsu*, a term which literally means entering *nirvāṇa* yet refers to dying of highly regarded monks (Skt. *parinirvāṇa*), was used for the death of Muhammad,[132] and *jakumetsu* and *nehan* (both meaning *nirvāṇa*) were employed to translate the Sufi concept of *fanā'*.[133] Moreover, the Qur'an is presented by Sakamoto as if it was the Lotus Sutra, with *kyō* (*sūtra*, as in "*kōrankyō*") and *bon* (section or chapter of Buddhist scripture) used for scripture (i.e., the Qur'an) and for the *sūrah*s (chapters) respectively.[134]

Some writers directly compare Islamic and Buddhist teachings. For example, the ultimate goals of Islam and Buddhism are virtually equated by Ōkubo in that the Muslim stance of "absolute submission (Ja. *zettai kie*) to God and the attitude of compassion and patience (Ja. *jihi ninniku*)" both lead "to the peaceful frame of mind based on faith (Ja. *anjin ryūmyō*)."[135] Kanshi Kagamishima (1912–1945), a Sōtō monk and scholar who worked with Ōkubo,[136] draws particularly direct parallels between Islam's emphasis on the correspondence of belief and action, and the main stances of such Buddhist masters as Shinran (1173–1263) and Dōgen (1200–1253).[137] He also argues that the *shahādah* (profession of faith) "has a similar significance to that attributed to passages of repentance (Ja. *zangemon*)" and of "taking refuge in the Three Jewels (Ja. *kie sanpō*) in Buddhism."[138]

Islam" instead of five, removing *shahādah* (profession of faith) from the list, perhaps due to the connotation of the Buddhist term *gyō* (or *shugyō*), which refers to (often physical) training, adopted to translate the word 'pillar.' Akiko Komura, "Six Articles of Faith and Four Pillars of Islam: How the Japanese Once Understood Islam," *Kotoba, bunka, komyunikēshon* 13 (2021), 83–101.

132 Hajime Kobayashi, "Mahometto no eizō," in *Gendai kaikyōken*, by Kōji Ōkubo and Hajime Kobayashi (Tokyo: Shikai Shobō, 1936), 45. Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 27; Eugen Mittwoch, "Mahometto no gōtan to nyūmestu," trans. Ryōzō Miyagi, *Kaikyōken* 1: 2 (1938), 58–61. *Gōtan* is also a Buddhist word for the Buddha's birth, used here for Muhammad's.

133 Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 27.

134 The translator gives transliterations of original Arabic terms alongside the Buddhist terms, e.g., *sura* (Ar. *sūrah*) for *bon*. Sakamoto, *Kōrankyō*, 2: 415; Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 173.

135 Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 48. Segawa also says that the teaching of Allah is there to save (Ja. *saido*, to edify and guide people to enlightenment) all people (Ja. *shujō*). Segawa, *Kaikyōto*, 187.

136 Although some of his work was published posthumously after the war, it is discussed here as work from the imperialist period. For more on Kagamishima, see Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 71f; Hirotsugu Ōsawa, "Kagamishima Kanshi ni yoru isurāmu kenkyū no shiteki igi," *Shūgaku kenkyū* 44 (2002), 205–10.

137 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 83.

138 Kagamishima, "Kaikyō kyōri," 38.

It is not clear if and to what extent the Japanese writers of this period intended to demonstrate the compatibility of Islamic and Buddhist teachings by employing the latter to explain the former. As for basic Buddhist terms, they probably used them out of convenience to describe Islam, as such Buddhist terms formed a stable component of their everyday vocabulary.[139] When it comes to the more loaded Buddhist expressions (especially those used by Kagamishima), however, the writers do seem to consciously attempt to highlight commonalities between them.[140] Although they did not systematically interpret Islam from a Buddhist perspective, these examples can be considered as parallelist as they emphasize the compatibility of the two traditions on a more fundamental level.[141]

The idea that Japanese writers used Buddhist terminology out of convenience is further supported by the fact that they used Buddhist terms much more often than Shinto ones to describe concrete Islamic practices and beliefs. In other words, they found Buddhist terms more suitable for such a purpose of cultural translation. This is possibly due to the fact that Buddhism, because of its developed doctrinal formulations, has a much richer vocabulary with which to translate different aspects of Islamic thought than Shinto. The latter has virtually no doctrines and thus does not easily provide terminology or context for the cultural translation of Islamic concepts.[142]

This being said, however, Shinto is perhaps much more conducive to comparisons with, and cultural translation of, Islam in the sense that both share a concept of there being a highest deity (Amaterasu in many Shinto cases). Both traditions can equally put this concept forward as the ultimate principle governing other cultural and spiritual traditions, which seems to serve as the basis of some of the parallelist remarks made by Japanese Muslims below.

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139 This can be confirmed by the fact that Ippei Tanaka (1882–1934), a Japanese convert, uses both Buddhist and Shinto words for Muslim practices. Ryū Kairen (Liu Zhi), *Tenpō shisei jitsuroku*, trans. Ippei Tanaka (Tokyo: Dainippon Kaikyō Kyōkai, 1941), 16. See below for Tanaka's view.

140 For a critical view of such use of Buddhist words, see Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 158.

141 For example, Ōkubo describes Allah as formless and colorless, but without directly likening Allah to Amida Buddha as in the case of contemporary Buddhists. Ōkubo, "Kaikyō no kōyō," 68.

142 Krämer, "Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents," 627. As for the cases of Japanese writers with a strong Pan-Asianist conviction, such as Shūmei Ōkawa (1886–1957), their heavy use of Buddhist terminology may also be attributed to their wish to highlight the commonalities between major Asian religious traditions: ibid., 629–30.

3.3 *Muslim Writings from the Imperialist Period*

Although not always in straightforward eulogy, non-Japanese Muslim writers continued to express sympathetic interest in Japan during the imperialist period, particularly at the time of incidents like the Great Earthquake, which hit the Tokyo area in 1923, and the disaster caused by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.[143] While non-Japanese Muslims in Japan transmitted abroad news about Japan,[144] Japanese converts developed their understanding of Islam in the framework of Japanese spirituality, as expressed in the contemporary imperialist agenda. In common with the non-Muslim Japanese writers mentioned above, they (e.g., Tanaka and Ariga) also began using *isurāmu* instead of *kaikyō* to refer to the Islamic tradition.

Mitsutarō Yamaoka, who equated Allah with Amaterasu-ōmikami at the time of his pilgrimage, later seems to have come to identify Allah with Amida Nyorai (Skt. *tathāgata*, i.e., Buddha), viewing Jōdo-shin Buddhism and Islam as identical.[145] Regarding the terms *islām* and *namu* in Jōdo-shin Buddhism as meaning *kie* (taking refuge, submission), he identified the "Muslim prayer of submitting to Allah" (*takbīr*) with the *nenbutsu*, *namu amida butsu*.[146]

In contrast, Ippei Tanaka (1882–1934), although he was far from being disinterested with regard to Buddhism,[147] approached Islam more in terms of its compatibility with Shinto, calling the former "*kaikyō shintō*" (Islamic Way of Kami).[148] Tanaka viewed the spirit of Shinto to be the historical truth itself, exploring the possibility of establishing a universal spiritual system based upon

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143 Sugita, *Chūtō hakken*, 232–6, 255.

144 Kurbanali issued the *Yani Yapan Mobhbiri* (1931–1937) for Tatar communities abroad. Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi*, 69–72; Sankei Shinbun, "Mosuku o tateta bōmei yatārujin," 2.

145 Saburō Shimano, "Mahomettokyō to nihon," 3 parts, *Mantetsu kaihō* 102 (1975), 11–3; 103 (1975), 8–9; 104 (1975), 10–11.

146 The attitude of *islām* is also identified with *kie* by contemporary Japanese Buddhists. See next chapter.

147 Tanaka was from a Rinzai Zen family and received training in a wide range of traditions, including Christianity, Shinto, and Chinese classics. Takahiko Tsubouchi, "Isurāmu senkusha Tanaka Ippei: shiron," *Takushoku daigaku hyakunenshi kenkyū* 8 (2001), 7; Shinji Maejima, ed., *Mekka* (Tokyo: Huyō Shobō, 1975), 175. For an English summary of Tanaka's thought, see Eddy Dufourmont, "'Tanaka Ippei: Islam and Pan-Asianism' 1924," in *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, 1920-Present*, eds. Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 87–91, esp. 87–90.

148 Ippei Tanaka, "Shina kaikyō mondai no shōrai to kōkoku shintō," in *Tanaka Ippei sono 3: nihon ron / nihon musurimu kara mita shintō*, ed. Takushoku Daigaku Sōritsu Hyakunenshi Hensanshitsu (Tokyo: Takushoku Daigaku Sōritsu Hyakunen Hensanshitsu, 2003), 5. In seeking a synthesis between Shinto and Islam, Tanaka was influenced by the syncretism between Confucianism and Islam that he witnessed in China. Tsubouchi, "Isurāmu senkusha Tanaka Ippei," 4–5; Krämer, "Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents," 623–4.

it.[149] Seeing in Islam an element of pristine Shinto, he equated the relationship between Allah and His 99 names with that between Ameno-minakanushi-no-kami, one of the heavenly deities associated with birth and becoming, and other numerous deities (Ja. *yaoyorozu no kami*).[150] Tanaka eventually developed a theory that five religions are essentially one and the same (Ja. *gokyō kiitsu ron*), recognizing Confucius, Laozi, Shaka (i.e., the historical Buddha), Christ, and Muhammad as saints of the Great Way (Ja. *daidō*), namely the Shinto-based Japanese spirituality.[151] While admitting that such a theory is incompatible with the genuine teachings of Islam, Tanaka saw great necessity in realizing "Mahāyāna Islam" (Ja. *daijōteki kaikyō*) in Japan, expecting Islam to develop in Japan as Buddhism did, that is, by focusing on what it shares with Shinto.[152] By incorporating Islam in this way, he argued, the traditional Japanese spirit would be strengthened.[153]

Although less engaged in political activities, Bunhachirō Ariga (1868–1946) also attempted to understand Islam in accordance with his country's imperialist agenda, arguing for a Japanese version of Islam.[154] An ex-

149 For his involvement with Shinto thought and practice, see Takahiko Tsubouchi, "Tanaka Ippei ni okeru shintō to isurāmu," in *Tanaka Ippei sono 3: nihon ron / nihon musurimu kara mita shintō*, ed. Takushoku Daigaku Sōritsu Hyakunen Hensanshitsu (Tokyo: Takushoku Daigaku Sōritsu Hyakunen Hensanshitsu, 2003), 411–93, esp. 415–26.

150 Tsubouchi, "Tanaka Ippei ni okeru shintō to isurāmu," 427; Ippei Tanaka, "Isureamu to daiajia shugi 1–3," in *Tanaka Ippei sono 3: nihon ron / nihon musurimu kara mita shintō*, ed. Takushoku daigaku sōritsu hyakunenshi hensanshitsu (Tokyo: Takushoku Daigaku Sōritsu Hyakunen Hensanshitsu, 2003), 37. Although some writers from this period call this former deity *ameno-minakano-nushi*, the present discussion uses Ameno-minakanushi(-no-kami) for simplicity. Tanaka also suggested that Shinto deities can be equated to angels in Islam. Nobuo Mori, "Kindai nihon no isurāmu ninshiki: Tanaka Ippei no isurāmu shinkō kara," in *Kindai nihon no isurāmu ninshiki: musurimu tanaka ippei no kiseki kara*, ed. Tanaka Ippei Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Jiyūsha, 2009), 107–8.

151 Tsubouchi, "Isurāmu senkusha Tanaka Ippei," 12, 14–5; "Tanaka Ippei ni okeru shintō to isurāmu," 430–31; Dufourmont, "'Tanaka Ippei: Islam and Pan-Asianism,'" 88. Tanaka's theory may have been influenced by Daoyuan, a Daoist-based Chinese religious group founded in the 1910s. The latter enshrined the founding figures of major religions, including Muhammad. "Tanaka Ippei ni okeru shintō to isurāmu," 428–9, 431.

152 Tsubouchi, "Tanaka Ippei ni okeru shintō to isurāmu," 431. The concept of Mahāyāna is also used for a universal spiritual system by a contemporary Japanese Muslim: see next chapter.

153 Tsubouchi, "Isurāmu senkusha Tanaka Ippei," 22.

154 Bunhachirō Agira, "Nihon ni okeru isuramukyō," in *Dōkyō no ippan, Nihon ni okeru isuramukyō*, by Shikita Koyanaghi and Bunhachirō Ariga (Tokyo: Tōhōshoin, 1935). 1–29; Komura, *Nihon isurāmushi*, 96, 112–3. While Japanese Muslims have generally welcomed Ariga's version of Islam, non-Muslim Japanese scholars often regard it as an unorthodox deviation. Kasama, *Kaikyōto*, 133; Kō Nakata, *Isurāmu no rojikku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 84. For Nakata's view, see next chapter.

Christian,[155] he criticizes Buddhism in Japan for being idolatrous and Buddhist monks for being too theoretical and lacking genuine faith.[156] He further maintained that the Buddhist stance against killing even an insect is not compatible with the mentality of the Japanese. Supporting Japan's militarism, Ariga claimed that Islam is "naturally best suited for the traditional Japanese spirit" as it "does not avoid fighting nor is afraid of death."[157]

Similarly to Tanaka, Ariga regarded Ameno-minakanushi as identical to Allah and drew heavily on Shinto in propagating Islam.[158] As "the ritual is unsuitable for Japan," Ariga "decided to change the practice and format of the (Islamic) prayer." He argued for praying by joining both hands together (as is done at Shinto shrines) and in Japanese (in analogy with the promotion of local languages by the European Reformation) instead of repeating the same Arabic phrases, which, according to him, "cools the faith."[159] He also urged (potential) Japanese converts to uphold the duties of admiring the Emperor and Empress, and of visiting family graves.[160]

Japanese Muslims of the imperialist period, like their contemporary non-Muslim Japanese writers, were deeply influenced by their nation's expansionist agenda. Japan's imperialist ideology, based as it was on state Shinto, provided the basic framework for their views. This is reflected particularly clearly in Tanaka's notion of Shinto as the Big Way, the highest principle that governs and unites all major religious traditions.[161] Despite their emphasis on

155 Ariga's conversion is regarded as more genuinely based on faith than that of others. Jun'ya Shinohe, "Ahmad Bunhachirō Ariga: Nihon ni okeru isurāmuhōgaku no senkusha to shiteno ichizuke," *Shūkyō kenkyū* 78: 2 (2004), 524f. He commissioned Gorō Takahashi (1856–1935), a prominent Christian, to translate the Qur'an for use by Japanese Muslims. Krämer, "Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents," 624–6.

156 Ariga, "Nihon ni okeru isuramukyō," 19.

157 Ibid., 22.

158 Ibid., 24, 29; Krämer, "Pan-Asianism's Religious Undercurrents," 627. Ariga had a clear focus on the oneness of God, and a stance of anti-idolatry. Ariga, "Nihon ni okeru isuramukyō," 28–9.

159 Ibid., 24. He himself did not know Arabic: Shinohe, "Ahmad Bunhachirō Ariga," 530–34.

160 He also employed a flexible approach to the consumption of alcohol and pork: Ariga, "Nihon ni okeru isuramukyō," 26–7.

161 State Shinto was considered at the time to transcend the definition of a normal "religion" (Ja. *shintō hi shukyō ron*, theory of Shinto as non-religion). It was seen as *kōdō* (the imperial way). See Hitoshi Nitta, "Shinto as a 'Non-Religion': The Origins and Development of an Idea," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 252–71; Koremaru Sakamoto, "The Structure of State Shinto: Its Creation, Development and Demise," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 272–94.; Nakata, *Isurāmu no rojikku*, 82f.

the compatibility between Shinto and Islam or the identification of Allah and Ameno-minakanushi (or Amaterasu-ōmikami as in Yamaoka), the approaches of these Japanese converts are generally inclusivist, rather than parallelist, due to the paramount centrality (or superiority) they attached to Shinto.

However, the ways in which the early Japanese Muslims assessed Buddhism vary considerably, depending on the traditions they converted from or those they were most familiar with. Ariga's dismissal of Buddhism as useless, and his superficial treatment of it, seem to derive from his ex-Christian background. In contrast, the way Tanaka drew on how Buddhism had taken root in the spiritual soil of Japan reflects his attachment to the tradition. It also shows that he regarded Buddhism as providing an ideal model for Islam to follow in spreading in Japan. Tanaka's concession that his theory was incompatible with the original teachings of Islam further suggests that it was his commitment to the Pan-Asianist program, coupled with his attachment to religious traditions in Japan, that led to him to 'compromise' Islamic teachings.

Yamaoka's case, although it may look less straightforward, also highlights important aspects of how early Japanese Muslims dealt with Japan's religious traditions. There are two potential reasons for his later identification of Allah and Amida Buddha (instead of Amaterasu). One is that he simply changed his mind as he came to know more about Islam. The other is that, as he became more purely religious and less engaged with political activities,[162] he shifted his focus from the state-supported Shinto-based ideology to Buddhism, a religion he was probably familiar with before his conversion, recognizing more commonalities between it and Islam.[163] Given his familiarity with both Islam and the Jōdo-shin tradition, Yamaoka's identification of Allah with Amida Buddha can be considered a rare wartime example of parallelism, wherein the idea of Shinto's supremacy is no longer in operation.

If Yamaoka's move from a Shinto-centric view of Islam to seeing it more through the lens of Buddhism corresponds with him becoming a more devout Muslim, this reinforces the possibility that Shinto, as understood in that period, was an ideological tool for expressing a Pan-Asianist agenda for Japanese Muslims, just as it was for non-Muslim Japanese writers. If this was the case, his focus on a primary Shinto deity, be it Amaterasu-ōmikami

162 For Yamaoka's last years, see Tazawa, *Musurimu nippon*, 202f; Fujio Komura, "Nihon isurāmukai no kusawake: Yamaoka Kōtarō okina no shūen no chi o tō," *Assāramu* 4: 3 (1976) http://islamjp.com/library/assalam4-c2.htm [accessed 31 October 2022].

163 Although it is not known whether he was once a practicing Jōdo-shin Buddhist, it can be inferred that he had at least a Buddhist background, as did most of his Japanese contemporaries.

or Ameno-minakanushi, was not so much an expression of a purely religious conviction, but a by-product of the contemporary political ideology. Japanese converts, as in the case of non-Muslim Japanese writers, regarded Buddhist concepts and practices as more translatable into those of Islam, given that many Japanese had considerable familiarity and involvement with the Buddhist tradition.

CHAPTER 6

Repositioning Islam in Contemporary Japan: Can Parallelism Challenge the Monotheism-Polytheism Divide?

As World War II drew to a close with the defeat of Japan in 1945, the Japanese involvement with and research on the Islamic world were abandoned and forgotten for a while.[1] After the war, the Japanese interest in Islam has tended to re-emerge only at times of major events like the Oil Crisis in the 1970s, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Gulf War, and the 9/11 attacks.[2] On the domestic front, Japanese involvement with Islam started to increase thanks to the appearance of a diverse Muslim community as the country's improved economy has brought many Muslims to Japan since the 1980s.[3] Moreover, the recent rise in the number of tourists visiting Japan from Southeast Asia, such as those from Indonesia and Malaysia, has led the tourist and hospitality industries to market *ḥalāl* food and to create prayer rooms in such places as major train stations and shopping malls.

The number of Muslims residing in Japan is estimated at around 140,000 to 150,000, just over 0.1% of the entire population.[4] The majority are

1 For the post-war tendency among Japanese scholars of Islam to ignore the academic achievements made during the war, see Akira Usuki, "Senjika kaikyō kenkyū no isan," *Shisō* 941 (2002), 191–205. For recent attempts to re-evaluate the thought and work of Shūmei Ōkawa (1886–1957), who was regarded as the central figure in wartime Islamic studies, see, e.g., Masayuki Yamauchi, "Ōkawa Shūmei ni yoru kaikyōto mondai kōkyū," in his *Isurāmu to amerika* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1999), 219–30.

2 Akira Usuki, "9/11 ikō o chūtō chiiki kenkyūsha to shite omō," *Minpaku tsūshin* 96 (2002), 7. Such an attitude has its roots in the pre-war tendencies to deal with Islam in an opportunistic manner whenever a significant event occurred, regarding it as "an issue to be resolved short-term." Usuki, "Senjika kaikyō kenkyū," 191.

3 Since their initial arrival in Japan, migrant Muslims have tended to engage in day labor (e.g., in construction sites and factories), catering businesses, and second-hand car dealerships. Some have emerged as highly successful second-hand car dealers and *ḥalāl* food shop owners, the two most significant niche occupations for long-term residents, while others work for Japanese companies as regular employees: see, e.g., Naoto Higuchi, Nanako Inaba, Kiyoto Tanno, Tomoko Fukuda, and Hirofumi Okai, *Kokkyō o koeru* (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2007). Recently, there has been a steady increase in Muslim workers (e.g., from Indonesia) in the field of elderly care.

4 For the basic demography of Muslims living in Japan, see, e.g., Hirofumi Tanada, *Nihon no mosuku: tainichi musurimu no shakaiteki katsudō* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2015), Ch. 1;

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migrant Muslims, originally from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and their children.[5] Between 20,000 to 30,000 are considered to be ethnic Japanese Muslims. While the majority of ethnic Japanese Muslims converted to Islam upon marrying a foreign-born Muslim, there are also an increasing number of individuals who embrace Islam out of personal conviction.[6] The children of the ethnic Japanese converts are born and brought up as Muslims, constituting the second generation of Japanese Muslims.[7]

Despite its small size, the Muslim community in Japan has equal rights to those granted to the followers of other religions to practice their faith and proselytize. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the current Japanese constitution and there is no list of officially recognized religions. Major religious institutions usually have the legal status of a religious juridical person (Ja. *shūkyō hōjin*), which exempts them from taxation on income resulting from religious activities. A number of Islamic organizations and mosques enjoy this status.

Japan's Muslim community is like a collection of smaller groups rather than one single large community, in that it comprises many communities of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.[8] They tend to be formed around mosques, with *ḥalāl* shops and restaurants located nearby. As of 2022, there

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Akira Hamanaka, "Tōkei kara mita nihon no isurāmu," in *Nihon ni ikiru isurāmu: kako genzai mirai*, ed. Sauji Arabia Taishikan Bunkabu (Tokyo: Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2010), 129–55. The first major occasion that produced Japanese converts since the end of the war was the Tabligh Jamā'at's mission to the country from Pakistan in the 1950s. Some Japanese also converted to Islam at the time of the Oil Crisis in the 1970s, perhaps out of their desire to raise their stakes in their businesses in the Middle East. Hiroshi Suzuki, *Isurāmukyōto no iibun* (Tokyo: Mekon, 2002), 239–40.

5 Hirofumi Okai, "Nihon to isurāmu: mosuku kara miru nihon no musurimu komyunitī," in *Daigakusei, shakaijin no tame no isurāmukōza*, eds. Yasushi Kosugi, Kenji Kuroda, and Tatsurō Futatsuyama (Kyoto: Nakanishiya Shuppan), 25–6.

6 However, motivations for conversion such as these are not mutually exclusive categories. For example, conversions upon marriage can either be out of convenience or of personal conviction. On the typology of conversion processes among the Japanese, see Yūsuke Katsura, "Nihon ni okeru isurāmu eno kaishū purosesu no bunrui: 'kekkon' ni kangen sarenai shokeiken ni chūmoku shite," *Shūkyō to shakai* 27 (2021), 65–79.

7 Okai, "Nihon to isuramu," 26–7. For the experiences of the children of Japanese-non-Japanese Muslim couples, see, e.g., Yoshimi Qureshi, "Second Generation Muslims in Japan: Their Perceived Internal Conflicts Made Apparent Through Interviews," *Keio SFC Journal* 21: 1 (2021), 154–76.

8 Emile A. Nakhleh, "Introduction to 'Islam in Japan: A Cause for Concern?'" *Asia Policy* 5 (2008), 62–7; Keiko Sakurai, "Muslims in Contemporary Japan," *Asia Policy* 5 (2008), 70–71, 86; Naoko Kawada, *Nihonjin joseishinto ga kataru isurāmu annai* (Tokyo: Tsukubanesha, 2004), 182.

are over 110 Muslim organizations and/or mosques in Japan,[9] including the Japan Muslim Association (Ja. Nihon Musurimu Kyōkai, established in 1952, the first Muslim organization in post-war Japan), which is primarily run by and for ethnic Japanese Muslims,[10] and the Islamic Center Japan, a missionary organization that was officially founded in 1975 following the Oil Crisis.[11] The list also includes the Kobe Muslim Mosque, the oldest surviving mosque in Japan, located in a multi-cultural district of Kobe, and the Tokyo Camii (Mosque), built in an elaborate Ottoman style, which opened in 2000.[12] These communities tend to cater to the needs of specific ethnic or linguistic groups, although many do have mixed congregations. With no umbrella organization representing all Muslims, and no common language spoken by all, not unlike Muslim minority diasporas in other countries, there is a general lack of unity among these diverse Muslim communities.[13]

The research organizations established in the post-war years to revive the Japanese tradition of Islamic studies include the Middle East Research Institute of Japan (Ja. Chūtō Chōsakai, 1956)[14] and the Association for Islamic Studies

9 For the latest list of Muslim places of worship in Japan, see Isuramu no Hōmupēji, "Kokunai shuyō reihaijo (masujido) to dantai," http://islamjp.com/benri/benriindex.htm [accessed 11 July 2022].

10 Nihon Musurimu Kyōkai (Japan Muslim Association), "Nihon musurimu kyōkai towa," https://www.muslim.or.jp/jma%e3%81%a8%e3%81%af [accessed 23 July 2022]. For more, see Mimasaka Higuchi, *Nihonjin musurimu toshite ikiru* (Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppansha, 2007), 157. The Association also established the first Muslim graveyard in Japan in 1964. Sakurai, *Nihon no musurimu shakai*, 187f; Suzuki, *Isurāmukyōto no iibun*, 249–50.

11 Islamic Center Japan, "About Us," http://islamcenter.or.jp/eng/about-us.html [accessed 10 November 2007]. This piece of information is no longer found on their current website, which only mentions 1966 as the year of its establishment and 1980 as the year when it was recognized as a religious juridical person. Islamic Center Japan, "About Us," https://islamcenter.or.jp/about-us [accessed 23 July 2022].

12 This replaced the Tokyo Kaikyō Reihaido (i.e., Tokyo Mosque, established in 1938, see Chapter 5), which was demolished in 1986 due to its decrepit condition. Tokyo Camii, "History of the Tokyo Camii," https://tokyocamii.org/history [accessed 23 July 2022]. Prior to the demolition of the original mosque, there was a dispute about its ownership between Kurbanali's supporters and rivals. Asādo Kuruban Arī, "Tokyo mosuku shōshitu no nazo," *Assarāmu* 48 (1991), 18–29.

13 Nakhleh, "Introduction," 64; Sakurai, "Muslims in Contemporary Japan," 71. Attempts have been made to bring together leaders of major mosques to discuss the situation and prospects for their communities. Notably, a group of scholars based at Waseda University have been hosting the National Meeting of Masjid Representatives in Japan annually since 2009. For the reports, see Taminzoku Tasedai Shakai Kenkyūjo, "Kenkyū katsudō, katsudō seika," Tainichi Musurimu Chōsa Purojekuto, https://www.imemgs.com/category/conf and https://www.imemgs.com/category/conf/page/2 [accessed 30 November 2022].

14 Chūtō Chōsakai, "Enkaku," http://www.meij.or.jp/prof/history.html [accessed 11 July 2010].

in Japan (Ja. Nihon Isuramu Kyōkai, 1963).[15] The first direct translation of the Qur'an from Arabic was published in 1957.[16] Post-war Islamic studies in Japan only took off in the 1980s.[17] The first department of Islamic studies in Japan was established at the University of Tokyo in 1982.[18] The Japan Association for Middle East Studies (JAMES, Ja. Nihon Chūtō Gakkai) was established in 1985 and has since become the largest platform in Japan for scholars working on the Middle East and Islam.[19] Large-scale government-funded projects on the Islamosphere have been undertaken since the 1980s through the collaboration of major universities and research institutions, exploring dynamics in Muslim-majority societies from a non-Western vantage point, as was done in the pre-war endeavors, yet in a much less politicized or ideologically loaded context.[20]

In contemporary Japan, not unlike in Western countries, Islam is commonly viewed as a radical type of religion, associated with intolerance, terrorism, strict rules, subjugation of women, and blind commitment to faith.[21] Such negative perceptions have been prominent in the post-9/11 discourse on Islam and have been reinforced whenever activities of extremist groups, such as ISIS, are reported. Due to the unfavorable press that Islam tends to receive, Muslims are

15 Nihon isuramu kyōkai, "Nihon isuramu kyōkai no gaiyō," http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/aisj/general.htm [accessed 11 July 2010] and "Hakkan no kotoba," *Isuramu sekai* 1 (1963), 1–3.

16 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Kōran*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957, re-translated in 1964). This was followed by translations by Japanese converts such as: Ryōichi Mita, *Sei kuruān: nichia taiyaku, chūkai*, rev. ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Musurimu Kyōkai, 1972, 1996); Haruo Abe, *Sei kuruān: nichiaei taiyaku, anmahen* (Tokyo: Tanizawa Shobō, 1982) (partial translation); Kō Nakata (supervisor), Kaori Nakata and Kazuki Shimomura, trans., Yōhei Matsuyama (trans. and commentary), and Reimei Isurāmu Gakujutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, ed., *Nichia taiyaku kuruān: hu yakkai to seitō jūdokushō chūkai* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2014); Makoto Mizutani and Kyōichirō Sugimoto, *Kuruān: yasashii wayaku* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2019).

17 Keiko Sakai, "Islam, Muslims, Neighbors in Asia?" in *Islam in the Eyes of the West: Images and Realities in an Age of Terror*, eds. Tareq Ismael and Andrew Rippin (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2010), 129.

18 Tōkyō Daigaku, "Isuramugaku kenkyūshitsu," http://www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Islam [accessed 13 July 2022].

19 Nihon Chūtō Gakkai, "Gaiyō," http://www.james1985.org/modules/about/index.php?content_id=1 [accessed 13 July 2022].

20 See Kieko Obuse and Armando Salvatore, "Middle East or 'Middle Earth?' 'Re-Orienting' Orientalism and Globalizing Area Studies," in *Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East*, eds. Armando Salvatore, Sari Hanafi, and Kieko Obuse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 869–74.

21 Tanada, *Nihon no mosuku*, 84–5.

often treated with suspicion, although, unlike in most Western countries, the *ḥijāb* (headscarf) is not a major source of discrimination.[22]

On a more everyday level, the extent of the marginalization of Muslims in Japan depends on the extent of 'foreignness' they are seen to possess.[23] This is predicated on the prevalent perception that Islam is a religion of foreigners, incompatible with Japanese customs and values. Non-Japanese Muslims do not tend to suffer more discrimination for being Muslim than non-Muslim foreigners, unless their religious observances are perceived as hindering the general order of society.[24] Being Muslim is accepted as part of their being foreign, and as foreigners they are not expected to conform perfectly to the social and cultural norms of Japanese society. Japanese converts, on the other hand, experience more suspicion from other Japanese, who tend to regard them as not conforming to Japanese socio-cultural norms, although situations may vary depending on their social circumstances and their dedication to Islamic practice.[25]

Whether migrants or converts, Muslims residing in Japan face various challenges in practicing Islam in their day-to-day lives. These include education for their children, where they need to make necessary arrangements with the

22 See below on the impact of extremist activities on Japanese perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

23 Ken'ei Sato, *Nihon no naka de isuramukyō o shinjiru* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 2015), 206–7. As mentioned above, 'Muslim-friendly' public spaces, such as prayer rooms and *ḥalāl* food restaurants, have become increasingly available across the country. Employees of big companies also have little trouble carrying out their religious observances. However, performing daily prayers during working hours can be problematic in smaller workplaces, such as construction sites and factories. Sakurai, *Nihon no musurimu shakai,* 197, 220–21; Michael Penn, "Islam in Japan," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10: 1 (2006) http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/168/1 [accessed 6 April 2009]; and "Public Faces and Private Spaces: Islam in the Japanese Context," *Asia Policy* 5 (2008), 95f. In interviews I conducted in October 2007, too, non-Japanese Muslims working at Japanese companies described their Japanese colleagues as being generally understanding about their dietary requirements and practice of daily prayers.

24 This category includes foreign-born Muslims who have obtained Japanese nationality. As the children of migrant Muslims and Japanese-non-Japanese couples have been growing up in Japan, speaking Japanese as their primary language and being versed in Japanese customs and culture, the distinction between non-Japanese and Japanese Muslims is becoming increasingly untenable. Given that the majority of ethnic Japanese Muslims are converts. I use the expression "Japanese Muslims" to refer to ethnic Japanese converts to Islam (as well as their children) unless otherwise stated.

25 Kieko Obuse "Living Compound Marginality: Experiences of a Japanese Muslim Woman," *Religions* 10: 7 (2019), 10–11. On the experiences of Japanese Muslims, see Kawada, *Nihonjin joseishinto*; Higuchi, *Nihonjin musurimu.*

school to ensure that they have *ḥalāl* meals and are dressed according to religious prescriptions,[26] and dealing with traditional Japanese practices, such as funerals and rites of ancestor commemoration. As will be seen below, the theological status of their non-Muslim family members can also be an important concern for many Japanese Muslims. Japanese Muslims' attitudes to Buddhism and Japanese religiosity vary considerably, ranging from wholesale dismissal to a mixture of sympathy and cautious distance, to an active appropriation of major Buddhist concepts.[27]

1 Islam-Related Incidents in Japan and the Discourse of Othering

Contemporary Japanese-Muslim relations, whether on an international stage of business and politics or on a more local level, have been relatively trouble-free, apart from a few sporadic incidents with negative consequences. However, these incidents are not negligible, as they tend to reflect important aspects of the Japanese view of Islam and fuel the contemporary Japanese discourse of Islam as wholly culturally other.

Some incidents on an international level have produced several casualties, although most of them do not seem to have been personally targeted. For example, some Japanese citizens were among the 64 tourists killed in the Luxor terrorist attack in 1997.[28] In July 1988, Yutaka Akino (1950–1998), along with three other members of the United Nations Mission of Observers, was shot dead in central Tajikistan by Muslim militants.[29] In August 2000, four experts of the Japan International Cooperation Agency and a translator were abducted in

26 Satō, *Nihon no naka de*, 99–123; Qureshi, "Second Generation Muslims,"161–6. The close contact between girls and boys at co-educational primary schools is also seen as a problem by some Muslim parents: my interview with a female Japanese Muslim, July 2014.

27 On Japanese Muslims' attempts to indigenize Islam, see Kieko Obuse, "The Japan Islamic Congress: A Possible Case of an Islamic New Religion in Japan," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 6 (2017), 241–63; and "Towards a Japanese Islam: A Japanese Convert's Attempt of Indigenisation" in *Muslim Minorities in East Asia: Accommodation and Contestation in the Lived Experience of East Asian Muslims*, ed. Yuka Kobayashi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming).

28 Jijitsūshinsha, "Ejiputo gaikokujin kankōkyaku shūgeki jiken," Nihonjin, kaigaijunanbo jiji.com/jc/v2?id=suffering_15 [accessed 20 November 2022].

29 Kōichi Inoue, "Akino Yutaka shi tsuitō pēji" (1998) http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/akino/akino.html [accessed 1 November 2022].

Kyrgyzstan by Islamic extremists from Uzbekistan.[30] There were also a couple of dozen Japanese citizens among the victims of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and further in 2003–4 during the Iraq War several Japanese citizens, including two diplomats, were kidnapped and/or murdered by extremist groups in Iraq.[31]

A rare example of a personalized incident is the murder on 11 July 1991 of Hitoshi Igarashi (1947–1991), the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie. A scholar of Islam and disciple of Toshihiko Izutsu, he was stabbed to death at Tsukuba University, where he taught.[32]

The more recent extremist activities of radicalized Islamic groups have triggered stronger reactions among the non-Muslim Japanese.[33] Some Islamic organizations in Japan have been placed under police surveillance and receive messages of censure and threats when a major terrorist incident takes place.[34] Individual Muslims are also avoided or taunted in public, with Muslim schoolchildren teased by their classmates, for example, for being possible terrorists.[35] After two Japanese hostages were murdered by ISIS in Syria in February 2015, some mosques received threats as well as hate messages calling them "the

30 Gaimushō (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), "Kirugisu ni okeru hōjin yūkai jiken chōsa hōkokusho," http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/kyrgyz/kidnap99/hokoku.html [accessed 1 November 2022].

31 Kōan Chōsachō (Public Security Intelligent Agency), "Omona hōjinhigai terojiken," https://www.moj.go.jp/psia/ITH/topics/Japanese_suffer.html [accessed 20 November 2022].

32 Koenraad Elst, "The Rushdie Rules," *Middle East Quarterly* 5: 2 (1998), 31–40; Steven R. Weisman, "Japanese Translator of Rushdie Book Found Slain," *New York Times* (13 September 1991) http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/04/18/specials/rushdie-translator.html?_r=1 [accessed 1 November 2022].

33 One possible reason for this is the common Japanese translation of the Islamic State, *isuramukoku*, which may have encouraged an easy association between ISIS and ordinary Muslims. Some Muslims have pleaded with the media to use a different nomenclature so that the reputation of their faith would not be associated with the group. Mainichi Shinbun, "Nagoya mosuku: kyōhaku, iyagarase, 'Gotōsan hitojichi' de aitsugu" (5 February 2015), reproduced in Nagoya Mosque https://nagoyamosque.com/3422.html [accessed 20 July 2022]; Jun Hori, "Isuramukoku yamemashita" (11 February 2015) http://bylines.news.yahoo.co.jp/horijun/20150211-00042956 [accessed 12 February 2015]. Other reasons may include improved access to information via the internet (including Islamophobic content) and the increasing visibility of the Muslim community in Japan due to its expansion.

34 In my interviews, a number of Muslims, both foreign-born and ethnic Japanese, reported being watched by the police. See also Saul J. Takahashi, "Muslim Surveillance in Japan: A Narrative Aimed at Trivialization," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4 (2008), 195–209.

35 Kawada, *Nihonjin joerishinto*, 166; Satō, *Nihon no naka de*, 28, 116; NHK, "Chanto shiritai! Isuramukyōto hogoshāzu tōjō," Uwasa no hogoshakai (broadcast 15 July 2016).

enemies of Japan" or telling them to "leave" the country.[36] It was also reported that an application to create a bank account made by a non-Muslim Japanese person for a group intended to raise awareness about Islam was rejected as the name of the group contained the term Islam.[37]

While these international events seem to reinforce the unfavorable perceptions of Islam among the Japanese, they have not triggered any serious political or communal strife between Muslims and non-Muslims in Japanese society; nor have they led to any persistent public debates on the presence of Muslims in Japan at a national level.

The more localized incidents, on the other hand, are usually attributable to non-Muslim Japanese being ignorant of the Islamic tradition, rather than constituting deliberate attempts to antagonize Muslims. The present discussion examines two incidents that occurred before September 2001, as most post-9/11 incidents are reactions to international events such as those mentioned above.

The first stage of the Ajinomoto incident dates back to 1988, when lard was found in some products made in Jakarta by the Japanese company Ajinomoto. As President Suharto played down the seriousness of the problem, it did not cause much trouble. However, once again in 2001, an enzyme originating in pork was found to be used in the process of production. A few staff members of the company including the president were detained on account of violating the consumer-protection law, and many people took to the streets to demonstrate against the company. President Wahid declared the product *ḥalāl*, on the ground that the enzyme in question was not contained in the finished product, while the Islamic body of *'ulamā'* regarded the product as *ḥarām*.[38] The news caused a serious concern in Japan over potential anti-Japanese reactions from Indonesia and other Muslim countries, particularly in political and business fields.

The Toyama Qur'an incidentoccurred in May 2001, when copies of the Qur'an and Hadith collections were stolen from a Pakistani mosque in Toyama prefecture. These were subsequently destroyed and thrown into a second-hand car shop run by a local Pakistani resident. Demonstrations were soon carried

36 Asahi Shinbun, "Aichi no mosuku ni kyōhakudenwa" (5 February 2015) http://www.asahi.com/articles/ASH254V9SH25OIPE04P.html?iref=comtop_6_04 [accessed 5 February 2015].

37 Asahi Shinbun, "Meigi ni 'isuramu,' kōza kotowaru" (1 March 2015) http://digital.asahi.com/articles/DA3S11627083.html?_requesturl=articles%2FDA3S11627083.html&iref=comkiji_txt_end_s_kjid_DA3S11627083 [accessed 1 March 2015].

38 Wayne Arnold, "Seasoning Fans Religious Tensions in Indonesia," *New York Times* (11 January 2001) https://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/11/business/seasoning-fans-religious-tension-in-indonesia.html [accessed 1 November 2022].

out by Muslims in and outside the prefecture, calling for more understanding regarding the importance of the Qur'an. Despite some suspicions based on conflicts and business rivalry between Japanese and Muslim residents in the area, the agent of this act, which many Muslims found blasphemous and utterly unacceptable, turned out to be a young Japanese woman whose alleged intention was to make trouble for her father.[39]

These two cases were triggered not by complete lack of awareness, but by half-baked knowledge of Islam. Both the Japanese company and the woman were aware of the basic Islamic interdiction that Muslims do not eat pork, and the importance of the Qur'an, respectively.[40] The Ajinomoto incident in 2001 cannot be overlooked as a minor mistake deriving from ignorance, since it had a precedent; the company chose to ignore it, perhaps missing the significance of the matter because the Indonesian president had taken care of the case so quickly in 1988. Similarly, the woman responsible for the Toyama Qur'an incident chose to destroy the Holy Book of Islam, as she had some, though vague, knowledge of the act being offensive to Muslims. However, neither the corporation nor the woman was fully aware of the gravity attached to breaking such Islamic rules of conduct.

The Japanese failure to appreciate how important religious injunctions are in Islam is partly attributed to the lenient attitude toward rules found among major religious traditions practiced in Japan.[41] This also explains why many Japanese simplistically regard Islam as strict and legalistic. Given this putative difference between Islamic and Japanese ideas of what a religion should be like, some scholars of Islam have even argued that the Japanese cannot understand Islam on the grounds that the Japanese are not deeply familiar with, hence do not understand or have a taste for, monotheism.[42]

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39 Sakurai, *Nihon no musurimu shakai*, 210f.

40 Most moderately educated Japanese would be aware of such basic Islamic injunctions: see Toru Miura, "Preface" and "Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese High Schools: Questionnaire Survey and Textbooks," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21: 2 (2006), 169–72 and 173–91 respectively; Taka'aki Matsumoto, "Nihon no kōkōsei ga idaku isurāmuzō to sono zesei ni muketa torikumi," *Nihon chūtō gakkai nenpō* 21: 2 (2006), 193–214.

41 See, e.g., Naoki Komuro, *Nihonjin no tameno shūkyō genron* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2000). The regimented or "ordering" nature of Islam is also mentioned by Sachiya Hiro, a contemporary Buddhist writer: see below.

42 For example, see Yoshiko Oda, "Isurāmu no shūkyōsei: nihonjin no shūkyōkan to hikaku shite," resumé of talk delivered at Doshisha University, Kyoto (18 June 2005) http://www.cismor.jp/uploads-images/sites/2/2005/06/3fa8e33c88194874864546749daaba12.pdf [accessed 1 November 2022].

1.1 *The Japanese Discourse of a Monotheism-Polytheism Divide*

The putative foreignness of monotheism for the Japanese, coupled with the increasingly negative perceptions of Islam as aggressive and intolerant, seem to be behind the surge of a chauvinistic discourse of othering addressed to Muslims that has emerged in reaction to the 9/11 attacks, as well as to the Taliban's destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan in 2001. Developing especially among intellectuals, this type of discourse highlights the ideas that Islam is prone to violence and that Islamic teachings are incommensurate with Japanese values through contrasting Islam and Japanese religions as exemples of monotheism and polytheism respectively.[43] The emphasis made by some of those authors on the importance of upholding the country's religious heritage, particularly Buddhism, amply suggests that the Japanese in general have a fairly strong cultural identity as Buddhist, which they will generally manifest especially in reaction to Christianity or Islam. The discussion of the putative superiority of polytheisms can involve a claim that polytheistic civilizations, having developed in harmony with nature, are more sustainable, hence conducive to environmentalist thinking.[44] As will be seen below, the distinction between Islam and Japanese religions (i.e., Shinto and Buddhism) as representing monotheism and polytheism respectively has been made commonly by non-Muslim Japanese and Japanese Muslims alike.[45] However, what is notable

43 Individuals participating in such debates do not usually have expertise in Islam: see, e.g., Nobuyuki Kaji, *Masukomi gizensha retsuden: tatemae o iitsunoru hitobito* (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, 2018), 248f; Akira Sadakata, *Zōo no shūkyō: yudaya, kirisuto isuramukyō to seinaru zōo* (Tokyo: Yōsensha, 2005); Takeshi Yōrō, *Baka no kabe* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2003), 192–204; Shū Kishida and Tōru Kotaki, *Amerika no seigibyō, isuramu no genribyō: isshinkyō no byōri o yomitoku* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2002), 179, 236–7, etc.; Takeshi Umehara, *Umehara Takeshi no jugyō: bukkyō* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2002), 252–4. The idea that monotheisms are more prone to intolerance and violence than polytheisms has been expressed since the time of the European Enlightenment, for example, by David Hume (1711–1776). However, it is not clear if specific Western thinkers have directly influenced the current Japanese discourse. On Hume's argument, see, e.g., Hans Joas, *The Power of the Sacred: An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment*, trans. Alex Skinner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), Ch. 1.

44 See Yoshinori Yasuda, *Isshinkyō no yami: animizumu no fukken* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2006). See also Katsuhiro Kohara, *Shūkyō no poritikusu: Nihon sekai to isshinkyō sekai no kaikō* (Kyoto: Kōyō Shobō, 2010), Ch. 4.

45 For criticism of this line of discourse and of the distinction between monotheisms and polytheisms, see, e.g., Shigeru Kamada. *Isurāmu no shinsō: 'henzaisuru kami' towa nani ka* (Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 2015), 127–138; Kazuko Shiojiri, "Shūkyōkan taiwa undō to nihon no isurāmu rikai," in *Shūkyō to taiwa: tabunka kyōsei shakai no naka de*, eds. Katsuhiro Kohara and Etsuko Katsumata (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 2017), 103–34; Kazuko Shiojiri, "Isurāmu o meguru shūkyōkan taiwa," in *Gurōbaru jidai no shūkyōkan taiwa*, eds. Keiji Hoshikawa and Yukiko Yamanashi (Tokyo: Taishō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2004), 109; Jun Fujii, "Isshinkyō

about the current discourse of a monotheism-polytheism divide is that the distinction is employed to highlight the notion that the Japanese, being polytheists, are more tolerant than monotheists, thereby serving as a strong tool of cultural othering.[46] This discourse is of particular importance since it shows a different level of intellectual rationalization of Islam's purported difference from those commonly found in the West.

2 Dialogues and Symposiums

Despite the occasional incidents mentioned above, there are overall few major problems between Japan and Muslim-majority countries, or issues between Muslims and non-Muslims in Japanese society, and so contemporary Japanese-Muslim and Buddhist-Muslim dialogues are generally free from impending confrontations.

Japanese-Muslim dialogues tend to be large in scale and involve both academics and politicians. Government-led sessions tend to have a diplomatic nature,[47] while those hosted by non-governmental organizations include large-scale inter-religious meetings[48] and symposiums on themes related to Islam.[49] The majority of them were organized in response to major terrorist

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to tashinkyō no gainen saikō," *Shunjū* 584 (2016), 1–4; Sōhō Machida, *Ningen wa shūkyō ni kateruka: isshinkyō bunmei no shūen* (Tokyo: Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, 2007), 123–8; Hiromi Shimada, *Nihonjin no kami wa dokoni iruka* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2002), 128–32. See also Nakata's view below.

46 The essentializing discourse of a monotheism-polytheism divide that highlights the foreignness of Islam as an intolerant monotheism may be comparable to the European discourse against Muslim women's practice of headscarf-wearing, which presents it as a symbol of cultural otherness of Islam, although the former has not been as highly politicized as the latter. Obuse, "Living Compound Marginality," 8, 21.

47 Japanese Prime Ministers have been participating in *iftār* in recent years. Shushō Kantei (Prime Minister's Office of Japan), "Zaikyō isuramu shokoku gaikādan tono ifutāru" (3 June 2019) https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/actions/201906/03islam.html [accessed 1 November 2022].

48 Examples include the sessions of the World Conference of Religions for Peace in Japan in 1976 and 2006, and of the Hieizan Shūkyō Samitto (The Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei) hosted by Nihon Shūkyō Daihyōsha Kaigi (Japan Conference of Religious Representatives), which started in 1987. World Conference of Religions for Peace, "About WCRP," https://www.wcrp.or.jp/about [accessed 1 November 2022]. The 2002 meeting of the latter involved a special session dedicated to dialogue with Islam: see Risshō Kōseikai, "Kyōto de hieizan shūkyō samitto 15 shūnen o kinenshi shūkai," (3 August 2002) https://www.kosei-kai.or.jp/rkknews/2002/post2280 [accessed 1 November 2022].

49 Efforts to raise grassroots awareness of Islam among the Japanese have also been made by groups of Muslims as well as Buddhists, through seminars and conferences. For an

incidents such as the 9/11 attacks and, more recently, the activities of ISIS. They discuss the implications of these events and possible measures to prevent future incidents and contribute to world peace. Apart from that, they tend to focus on diplomatic ties and economic cooperation between Muslim majority countries and Japan, making only marginal reference to doctrinal issues.[50]

Generally speaking, Islam receives much more attention than Japanese traditions. This may be because most of the Japanese participants are experts in

example of a Buddhist temple that organizes meetings and lecture series on Islam involving local Muslim residents, see Nippon.com, "Otera de manabu isuramu: hirogaru ibunkarikai no wa– ōita" (18 May 2018) https://www.nippon.com/ja/news/yjj2018051601231 [accessed 8 September 2022].

50 The examples considered are (1) The symposium "Islamic Civilization and Japan," organized by the Japan Foundation in 1980. This is arguably the first dialogue of its kind and involved Muslims from both Asia and the Middle East. Kokusai Kōryū Kikin (Japan Foundation), *Isurāmu bunmei to nihon bunmei* (Tokyo: Kokusai Kōryū Kikin, 1981). (2) The series of 8 seminars entitled "Dialogue among Civilizations between Japan and the Islamic World," hosted by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2002–2010, in response to the 9/11 attacks: for programs and lists of participants. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Isuramu sekai tono Bunmeikan taiwa," http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/islam/index.html [accessed 21 July 2022]. The proceedings of sessions up to the fifth seminar were available at Middle East Institute of Japan, "The Dialogue among Civilizations between Japan and the Islamic World," http://www.dialogue-jpis.net [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available]. (3) A two-day symposium hosted by the Arabic Islamic Institute in Tokyo on cultural exchange between Japan and Islam (Saudi Arabia), 29–30 May 2004. Arabic Islamic Institute, "Daiyonkai shinpojium," http://www.aii-t.org/j/sympo/20040529.htm [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available]. (4) Two sessions organized by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in 2002 on the theme "The Linked Destinies of the Islamic World and Japan." Sasakawa Peace Foundation, "FY2002 Annual Report, Part 1," http://www.spf.org/e/publication/annual/pdf/ar02_1.pdf [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available]. (5) A two-day symposium on the theme "Musurimu to nihon no shūkyōsha tono taiwa puroguramu: heiwa no tameno kyōtsū vijon o motomete," held in Tokyo on 8–9 April 2015. It was co-organized by the WCRP Japan committee and the Muslim World League, an Islamic NGO based in Mecca, with the support of the Japan Muslim Association, and attended by leading represenatives of Islam, Buddhism (including major new religious organizations such as Risshō Kōseikai), Christianity, and Shinto. Naofumi Yukimoto, "Sōgorikai motome, isuramukyōto to nihon no shūkyōsha ga taiwa: kagekiha no bōryoku o hinan," *Christian Today* (13 April 2015) https://www.christiantoday.co.jp/articles/15810/20150413/world-muslim-league-wcrp-japan-committee.htm; "WCRP nihon iinkai kaichō to sekai isurāmu renmei jimusōchō, taiwa puroguramu de kyōzon uttae," *Christian Today* (16 April 2015) https://www.christiantoday.co.jp/articles/15846/20150416/muslims-japanese-religious-dialogue-keynote.htm; "Musurimu tono taiwa puroguramu de Itagaki Yūzō tōdai meiyo kyōju ra ga hatsudai: 'jikohihan to taiwa' nado uttae," *Christian Today* (25 April 2015) https://www.christiantoday.co.jp/articles/15850/20150425/muslim-dialogue-itagaki-yuzo.htm [all accessed on 26 July 2022].

Islamic or Middle Eastern studies,[51] while non-Japanese Muslim participants do not usually have any expertise in Japanese religions. The speakers rarely compare or relate Islamic and Japanese traditions, and even when they do, they make rather generalized statements to emphasize the compatibility of Islam with Japanese spirituality. For example, Mahmood Boroujerdi, president of the International Center for Dialogue among Civilizations in Tehran, argued in the 2004 session of the series "Dialogue among Civilizations between Japan and the Islamic World" hosted by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that gods and goddesses in Shinto all exist as imagery in a conceptually imaginary world, thereby lacking any concrete form or idolized shape. He compared this to externalized symbols in Buddhism such as statues (which he unabashedly calls idols), temples, portraits, and monks' ritual implements. While this indicates that Buddhism may be problematic for Muslims, he does not discuss how these symbols are evaluated in Islam.[52]

In the 2002 event organized by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation on the theme "The Linked Destinies of the Islamic World and Japan," E. Tevfik Ünaydin (1927–2012), the former Turkish ambassador to Malaysia, suggested that belief in the almighty God and Judgment Day, and compulsory daily prayers, may be difficult for the Japanese to understand. Instead of explaining how Islam compares to Buddhism or Shinto in those respects, he made the very general statement that every religion has more or less the same values and that Islam could be assimilated into the Japanese culture.[53] This last point may have been an expression of diplomacy or a friendly gesture, since he must be aware of the fact that it is usually Islam that is prone to assimilate indigenous religious elements, as can be seen especially in Southeast Asia, rather than vice versa.[54]

A rare example of direct comparison of Islamic and Japanese traditions was made by Yūzō Itagaki (1931-), a key advisor to the government on issues concerning Islam and the Middle East. In the 2004 session of the series "Dialogue among Civilizations between Japan and the Islamic World" he argued that the pantheistic worldview of the Japanese is close to the notion of multiple

51 Interestingly, even Kōsei Morimoto (1934-), a scholar of Islam and former abbot of Tōdaiji, does not seem to have been expected to represent Buddhism. Kōsei Morimoto and Tetsuo Yamaori, "Bukkyō to isuramukyō," in *Yamaori Testuo taidanshū: nihonjin no kokoro no tabi*, by Tetsuo Yamaori (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006), 265. See below for Morimoto's view.

52 Chūtō Chōsakai (Middle East Institute of Japan), "Daisankai bunkakan taiwa seminā" [11 November 2007, page no longer available]. For a summary of this session, see Gaimushō, "Dai 3 kai isuramu sekai tono bunmeikan taiwa seminā (gaiyō to hyōka)," https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/islam/seminar3_gh.html [accessed 21 November 2022].

53 Sasakawa Peace Foundation, "FY2002 Annual Report," 22, 24.

54 See, e.g., Bayoumi's view below.

signs of God in Islam; and the Japanese tendency to incorporate different traditions corresponds closely to the Muslim view of other revealed religions. He also holds, as Japanese Muslims of the imperialist period did, that a notion of a creator God is found in the central Shinto goddess Ameno-minakanushi-no-kami.[55] However, Itagaki did not explain how Shinto and Islam could be related, based on such supposed fundamental commonalities.

Three possible reasons can be highlighted for why detailed discussions of religious teachings were avoided in the dialogues described above. The first is that diplomatic ties, economic cooperation, and other socio-cultural issues were deemed more important than religious matters. The second is that the participants may have felt Islam and Buddhism (or Shinto) to be so different that comparing them could disturb their relations. The third and final factor is that these dialogues between representatives of Japan and Muslim-majority countries suffered a serious imbalance in terms of the representation of religious traditions. For example, the participants in the symposium hosted by the Arabic Islamic Institute in Tokyo in 2004 included a number of Saudi Arabian academics, a few Japanese Muslims, a monk-scholar from the Tendai school of Buddhism, and a Shinto scholar. At times the Japanese side included both Muslim and non-Muslim participants, as seen in the 2002 event organized by the Sasakawa Foundation. Each roundtable had three panelists and a Japanese moderator. The panelists of the first roundtable were all Japanese, one of whom was Muslim. The second featured three Muslims from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, talking to the same Japanese moderator. The absence of a unified religious stance across the Japanese side, coupled with the way in which they placed less emphasis on religious elements in representing 'Japanese civilization,' seems to have prevented balanced discussions in the area of religion.

2.1 *Buddhist-Muslim Dialogues in Japan*

In contrast to the Japanese-Muslim sessions, the still rare cases of Buddhist-Muslim dialogues are usually small in scale. Their main purposes are much less diplomatic or political than those of the larger sessions. As the backgrounds of the participants are clearer on these occasions, they discuss both the differences and similarities between the two traditions more freely, in a friendly atmosphere created by a sense of solidarity between co-religionists.

55 Chūtō Chōsakai (Middle East Institute of Japan), "Daisankai bunkakan taiwa seminā" [11 November 2007, page no longer available]. See also Yūzō Itagaki, "Nihon karano isurāmu ninshiki: jōken to kanōsei," in his *Isurāmu gonin* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 257f. For a contemporary Japanese presentation of Ameno-minakanushi-no-kami as the only creator God, see Aki Izumoi, *Kyōkasho ga oshienai nihon no shinwa* (Tokyo: Fusōsha, 1998).

While efforts to arrange dialogues with Muslims have mostly been limited to the circle of so-called "new Buddhism" (i.e., Buddhism-based new religions),[56] traditional Buddhist schools have also recently been active in this field. Some of those initiatives are Buddhist-Christian-Muslim sessions, i.e., trialogues.

Dialogue sessions published for a general readership tend to focus on practices and ethics rather than on doctrinal issues, with the latter being mentioned only when discussing differences between the two traditions.[57] The

56 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 6. New religions (Ja. *shinshūkyō*) refer to religious organizations that emerged from the late nineteenth century onward, often in response to drastic social changes. While displaying different characteristics that reflect the sociopolitical and economic contexts of the times in which they emerged, new religions tend to be focused on the pursuit of happiness in the present life, promote teachings and practice that are easily accessible to the ordinary populace, and be led often by lay teachers with worldly professions. Although independent of an established religious organization, some new religions draw on the teachings of one or more traditional religions: Susumu Shimazono, "Shinshūkyō no han'i," in *Shinshūkyō jiten*, eds. Nobutaka Inoue et al. (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1990), 5–6; Shigeru Nishiyama, "Jidaigoto no tokuchō," in *Shinshūkyō jiten*, eds. Nobutaka Inoue et al. (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1990), 23. Risshō Kōseikai, mentioned below, is a major example of a Buddhism-based new religion.

57 The present discussion examines the following five sessions. (1) The dialogue "Isurāmu to bukkyō," held in 1976 among Nikkyō Niwano (1906–1999), (then) president of Risshō Kōseikai, A. R. Siddiqui from Saudi Arabia, and Sekihei Saitō (1908–1998), ex-president of the Japan Muslim Association. Nikkyō Niwano, A. R. Siddiqui, and Sekihei Saitō, "Taidan: isurāmukyō to bukkyō," *Assarām* 5 (1976): 8–17. Risshō Kōseikai has closely interacted with the Islamic Center Japan and the Japan Muslim Association. (2) The dialogue "Global Civilization" between Daisaku Ikeda (1928-2023), (then) president of Sōka Gakkai, another Buddhism-based new religion, and Majid Tehranian (1937-2012), an Iranian scholar of a Sufi background and director of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research. Daisaku Ikeda and Majid Tehranian, *21 seiki eno sentaku* (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 2000) and *Global Civilization: A Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue* (London: British Academic Press, 2003). (3) The Buddhist-Christian-Muslim Dialogue, organized by All-Japan Soto Young Priests' Association in 2002. The participants were Aquil Ahmed Siddiqui (1944-), (then) secretary-general of the Islamic Center Japan, Juan Masia (1941-), a Jesuit priest and professor at Sofia University, Japan, and Yukihide Ikegami, (then) president of the Association. Aquil Ahmed Siddiqui, Juan Masia, and Yukihide Ikegami, "Shūkyōshakan no taiwa," *Sōsei* 119 (2002), 4–8. (4) The Buddhist-Christian-Muslim Dialogue of 2005, entitled "Eichi: tero o koeru shūkyō no chikara." The participants were Eiin Yasuda (1938-), (then) chief abbot of the Hossō school of Buddhism, Seiichi Shirayanagi (1928–2009), a Catholic cardinal and (then) chairperson of the WCRP Japanese committee, Mimasaka Higuchi (1936–2019), honorary president of the Japan Muslim Association, and Yoshiaki Sanada (1937–2017), a scholar of law and (then) director of the WCRP peace research institute, acting as a moderator. Eiin Yasuda, Seiichi Shirayanagi, Mimasaka Higuchi, and Yoshiaki Sanada, *Eichi: tero o koeru shūkyō no chikara* (Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppansha, 2005). (5) The dialogue between Selim Yücel Güleç (1966-), (then) director of the Islam Cultural Center, Kyoto, and Toshihide Adachi (1957-),(then) assistant professor of Bukkyō University with expertise and background as a

similarities and connections between Buddhism and Islam explored in these sessions include the ethical commitment to performing good deeds and the possible Buddhist influence on the development of Sufism.[58] Muslim participants also observed a high level of compatibility between Islam and the value system and code of practice found among the Japanese, such as respect for others, diligence, cleanliness, and hospitality.[59] Regarding differences, the strictly defined system found in Islam and the more flexible attitude in Buddhism to prayers and giving alms were discussed in perhaps the first Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Japan, held in 1976 among Nikkyō Niwano, (then) president of Risshō Kōseikai, a major lay Buddhist group based on Nichiren Buddhism, A. R. Siddiqui from Saudi Arabia, and Sekihei Saitō, ex-president of the Japan Muslim Association.[60] Siddiqui also emphasized the difference between the "thoroughly human" nature of Prophet Muhammad and the Buddha as a somewhat divinized object of worship.[61] The 2006 dialogue between Selim Yücel Güleç and Toshihide Adachi took up differences between the Pure Land in Buddhism and Paradise in Islam,[62] and between Allah and the Buddha.[63] In this remarkedly open discussion, Adachi clarified that Buddhism does not recognize the existence of a creator God as a being completely separate from human beings. He also voiced reservation about Güleç's opinion that the historical Buddha Śākyamuni was a prophet sent by the only creator God to propagate the ultimate truth.[64] However, he did not attempt to locate the Islamic tradition in the Buddhist worldview.

The only potential attempt to relate Buddhism and Islam doctrinally from a Muslim perspective was Güleç's idea of common ethics being shared by all traditions,[65] conjoined with the notion of the prophethood of the Buddha(s). That he was working with the *dīn al-fiṭrah* theory is also suggested by his remark that Buddhism was originally idol-free, which would reflect the message of *islām.*[66] Niwano, representing Buddhism, was more willing to recognize

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monk in the Jōdo school of Buddhism. It was organized by Chion-in, the headquarters of the Jōdo school, in 2006. Selim Yücel Güleç and Toshihide Adachi, "Isurāmu tono taiwa," 2 parts, *Chion* (October 2006), 6–17; (November 2006), 6–17.

58 Ikeda and Tehranian, *Global Civilization*, 99.

59 Siddiqui et al., "Shūkyōshakan no taiwa," 6; Güleç and Adachi, "Isurāmu tono taiwa," 1: 14.

60 Sidiqqui et al., "Shūkyōshakan no taiwa," 9–10.

61 Ibid., 11–2.

62 Güleç and Adachi, "Isrāmu tono taiwa," 2: 11–3.

63 Ibid., 2: 10f.

64 Güleç holds that all the Buddhas were also prophets. Ibid., 2: 10–14.

65 Ibid., 2: 17.

66 Ibid., 10. He reiterated this possibility in my interview, although he was strongly critical of the concepts of reincarnation and Buddhism's perceived idolatry. My interview with

similarities between major concepts of the two traditions, suggesting in response to Siddiqui's above-mentioned remark that the nature of Śākyamuni Buddha is comparable to that of Prophet Muhammad. He further observed that the eternal Buddha in Buddhism, God in Heaven in Christianity, and Allah in Islam are all the same. The pluralist thrust of his message was clear when he said: "To us [Buddhists] it appears to be the Buddha, and to [Muslims], Allah."[67]

In these dialogues, the general hesitation among the actors to relate doctrinally to one another's teachings may be attributed to the relatively low level of Buddhist-Muslim involvement in contemporary Japan. There is no political agenda like that found in the wartime period, nor communal tensions like those found in some Southeast Asian countries today, which could motivate each side to seek accommodation of the other. They do not engage in parallelist discussions on the level of the ultimate truth. The frequent reference made to the differences between major concepts of the two traditions in these sessions also indicates that many participants feel that Buddhism and Islam are irreconcilably different in terms of doctrines. As seen below, the lack of knowledge of Japanese religions among Muslim leaders based in Japan makes a stark contrast with how Japanese converts have produced rich and original reflections on the relationship between Islam and Japanese religions, particularly Buddhism, regarding this as an existentially pressing issue.

The absence of urgent socio-political or communal disputes, on the other hand, may have allowed more purely academic explorations to develop. For example, Ryukoku University, which is affiliated with the Jōdo-shin school of Buddhism,[68] has in recent years undertaken a series of interfaith projects involving Buddhism and Islam, including dialogues involving Shi'a Islam[69] and trialogues among Jōdo-shin Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. These sessions often have an explicit focus on doctrinal issues, with direct comparisons of

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Selim Yücel Güleç at Islam Cultural Center, Kyoto, November 2007. For the meaning of the term *islām*, spelled in lower case, see Chapter 1.

67 Niwano et al., "Taidan," 12; Kieko Obuse, "Bukkyōto to musurimu no sōgoninshiki: nihon-bukkyō kara no shiza o chūshin ni," *Working Paper No.16–10, Annual Report for Year 2016*, BARC Research Center for Buddhist Culture in Asia, Ryukoku University (Kyoto: BARC Research Center for Buddhist Culture in Asia, Ryukoku University, 2017), 147–8. The idea that the monotheistic notion of a supreme being is shared across all the traditions is also expressed in Yasuda et al., *Eichi,* 64.

68 See Chapter 1 for the basic teachings of the Jōdo-shin school.

69 For example, a comparability between Zen enlightenment and the Sufi experience has been pointed out, based on the exchanges made between scholars of Ryukoku University and two universities in Iran (University of Religions and Denominations in Qom and Shiraz University) in 2012. Tosei Sano, "Dialogue with Shi'a Islam: In research of Common Points of Mysticism with Japan," *Kokusai bunka kenkyū* 17 (2013), 25–34.

Buddhist and Islamic concepts of ultimate reality undertaken. In a symposium on trialogue held in Kyoto in October 2016, Abolghasem Jafari, an Iranian scholar from the University of Religions and Denominations in Qom, identified God in Islam with Amida Buddha in a strikingly pluralist fashion. He argued that it is not accurate to say that there is no God in Buddhism, referring to the theological definition of God in Islam as the absolute, limitless, and only Being.[70] As if to play down the putative absence of a concept of a creator in Buddhism, he adds that creation is an action of God and not the definition of what God is,[71] concluding that "Amida Buddha, in being limitless light and limitless life, can be God."[72] Jafari further equated the Buddhist act of *namu* (or *kie*, taking refuge) with the Muslim attitude to God. This leads him to regard *nenbutsu* (chanting of the name of Amida) in Jōdo-shin Buddhism and prayers in other religions such as Islam as the same, suggesting a convergence of all religious traditions.[73] He reinforced this affinity with the idea that the relationship between the Islamic notion of *tawakkul* (reliance on God) and human effort is the same as that between *tariki* (other-power, i.e., the salvific power of Amida) and *jiriki* (self-power, self-effort) emphasized in the Jōdo-shin tradition. Here, he highlighted the futility of the *jiriki*-inspired attempt on the grounds that there is no independent self in Buddhism, adding that *jiriki* is the "opposite" to the Mahāyāna notion of emptiness (i.e., the absence of fixed, inherently existing substance constituting individual things and beings), hence untenable.[74]

Jafari's view received a cautious response from Shinryō Takada, a philosopher of religion with a Jōdo-shin Buddhist background. He insisted on the incomparability of the Buddha and God, observing that whether the Buddha and God are the same, or more specifically whether Amida Buddha is like God/Allah, is the trickiest issue in "the dialogue between Buddhism and monotheisms."[75] Takada's focus on the categorical distinction between monotheism and non-monotheism certainly seems rather strong compared with other contemporary scholars engaged in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, such as Shah-Kazemi (discussed in Chapter 4) and Kono (see below). Yet he might have reacted less

70 Abolghasem Jafari, "Isurāmu to bukkyō no taiwa: iran isurāmu no shiten," trans. Tōsei Sano, in *Tabunkajidai no shūkyōgaku nyūmon*, eds. Eiji Hisamatsu and Tōsei Sano (Tokyo: Mineruva Shobō, 2017), 221.

71 Ibid., 221.

72 Ibid., 222. A similar view is expressed by Shah-Kazemi (see Chapter 4).

73 Ibid., 223.

74 Ibid., 227.

75 Ibid., 231.

strongly if Jafari had presented his argument in a more parallelist manner, rather than postulating full convergence.

Another notable initiative by Ryukoku University was a trialogue project undertaken in collaboration with the University of Münster and Georgetown University in 2016–19.[76] Its first symposium, entitled "Shin Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam: Conversations in Comparative Theology," was held at Ryukoku University in February 2016. The event involved a workshop dedicated to an in-depth comparative discussion of the teachings of Jōdo-shin Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, on the general theme of Truth/Reality, with its four sessions addressing (1) Buddha's Teaching, Revelation, Logos; (2) Universality and Exclusivism; (3) Myth and History; and (4) Amida, Allah, Trinity. The workshop employed a parallelist format of dialogue, with each panel featuring presentations by three participants, each of whom represented one of the three traditions.[77]

3 Muslim Writings in Contemporary Japan

The majority of Muslim references to Buddhism in Japan, like those from the inter-religious sessions, are rather brief and fragmentary, usually constituting subsections of general comments on Japanese religiosity. While some authors openly criticize Buddhism (e.g., for idolatry), few writers employ an overtly polemical tone, perhaps to avoid direct confrontation with the dominant religious heritage of the country.

Non-Japanese authors do not show much willingness to relate doctrinally to Buddhism. This may be because they do not have enough direct experience with Buddhists or knowledge of Buddhism to feel that the two traditions have any mutual theological relevance. Some Japanese converts to Islam, on the other hand, have attempted to apply the doctrine of prophethood to Japan, looking for a Japanese prophet. While this is a new phenomenon in Japan, Japanese Muslims, unlike Muslims outside Japan who tend to recognize

76 This was followed by three other workshops at the University of Münster, Georgetown University, and the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley in 2017, 2018, and 2019, respectively. Dennis Hirota, "Conversations from the Shin Buddhist-Muslim-Christian Workshops, 2016–2019: Introduction" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 42 (2022), 239–240. Some of the papers presented at these workshops have been published in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 42 (2022).

77 Kyōto Shūkyōkei Daigaku Rengō, "Ryūkoku daigaku yori shinpojūmu no goannai," https://www.kgurs.jp/news_list/780.html [accessed 26 July 2022].

Śākyamuni Buddha as 'the' prophet for Buddhists, do not always look to the Buddhist tradition for a suitable candidate. This may be related to Shinto having a clear-cut concept of there existing one deity at the head of the pantheon, while Buddhism takes highly diverse forms in Japan.

3.1 *Accounts by Non-Japanese Muslims*

In discussing Japanese religiosity, non-Japanese Muslims based in Japan do not usually specify which tradition or school of Buddhism they address. While many observe that the Japanese are similar to Muslims in terms of social ethics and morality,[78] none makes an overt attempt to relate doctrinally to Buddhism.

Mohsen Bayoumi, the then *imām* of the Kobe Muslim Mosque, hailing from Egypt,[79] discusses in a speech "Environmental Obstacles to Da'wa in Japan" the difficulties encountered when spreading Islam to the Japanese. He noted two problems concerning Japanese religiosity. Firstly, although the Japanese adhere to both Shinto and Buddhist practices, they never hold a "sincere belief in any particular religion." Secondly, the Japanese have a tendency to transform a religion as they incorporate it into their culture; he claims that the Japanese have taken the originally world-denying tradition of Buddhism and reformed it in their own world-affirming version.[80] On this point, Bayoumi claimed that Islam cannot be changed or absorbed into the Japanese culture, since "[it] is a complete and unchangeable social model which extends to every aspect of daily life."[81]

In stark contrast, *Islam and the Japanese* (1980, 2001) by Abdul Baset al-Sebai (1938-), an academic with a Palestinian-Egyptian background, attempts to interpret Buddhism in the Qur'anic framework.[82] Despite the presence of various spiritual and moral traditions in Japan, al-Sebai, similarly to Bayoumi, doubted that Japan developed a universalist type of moral teachings based on

78 Hāji Marudani, *Hige to vēru to medamayaki* (Tokyo: Sengensha, 2002), Introduction; Salih Samarrai, "Nihon ni okeru isurāmu fukyū no rekishi to hatten," *Assarāmu* 86 (2002); Samarrai, "Dawa Islamiyya." For similar views expressed by Japanese Muslims, see Kawada, *Nihonjin joseishinto*, 209; Higuchi, *Nihonjin musurimu,* 234.

79 Mohsen Bayoumi, "Environmental Obstacles to Da'wa in Japan," speech at the Arabic Islamic Institute, (date unknown) http://himebado.hp.infoseek.co.jp/aii1.htm [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available].

80 For this idea, he quotes Ichirō Hori et al. eds., *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency of Cultural Affairs* (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1972), 66. Mohsen Bayoumi, "Environmental Obstacles," 4.

81 Ibid.

82 He studied in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s and later worked for the Islamic Center Japan. Abdul Baset Al-Sebai, *Isurāmu to nihonjin* (Tokyo: Chōbunsha, 2001).

religion.[83] He regarded the lack of faith (in God), for example, as the main cause of suicides in Japanese society.[84] However, unlike Bayoumi, al-Sebai did not dismiss the possibility that Japanese traditions can be considered valid from an Islamic perspective. He argued that those with a genuine belief in the only God, regardless of their religious affiliation, are on the path of *islām* (even if not necessarily following the historically contoured religion of Islam). Noting that there may be more prophets than the 25 who are named in the Qur'an, he further suggests that Buddhism may be one of the "historical movements of social reform [which] may have been guided by prophet(s) unknown to us." However, he does not speculate as to who that might be.[85]

The radical difference between the approaches of these two writers is partly attributable to the contexts in which their ideas were expressed. Bayoumi's focus on potential clashes between Islamic and Japanese religiosity probably stems from the fact that his is a speech on proselytization efforts, addressed mainly to fellow Muslims. Al-Sebai's book, which is meant for popular Japanese readership, is generally sympathetic to Japanese culture and spirituality, and argues only as an afterthought for the importance of belief in God. Although he seems to work with the *dīn al-fiṭrah* theory, he does not develop the idea systematically in the Japanese context.

Due to the scarcity of data, nothing certain can be said at this point about how non-Muslims based in Japan perceive Buddhism. However, the reluctance of these two writers to relate doctrinally to Buddhism seems to derive partly from the fact that they are not from countries with a long history of Buddhist-Muslim coexistence, nor have they had much personal involvement with Buddhists.[86]

3.2 *Accounts by Japanese Muslims*

Apart from a couple of second- and third-generation believers, the Japanese Muslim writers discussed here are converts. They tend to be more concerned with how Islam can be related to Japanese culture than with how the Buddhist tradition can be interpreted according to Islam. They often mention

83 Ibid., 69.

84 Ibid., 81f.

85 Ibid., 44–6. On the presumptive number of prophets in human history according to Islamic doctrine, see Chapter 1.

86 They may interact with the Japanese in general; however, as is clear from Bayoumi's personal comments about Buddhism, they do not seem to have much experience with or knowledge of it. My interview with Mohsen Bayoumi at Kobe Muslim Mosque, 12 November 2007.

Christianity alongside Buddhism to describe how different Islam is from traditions already familiar to the Japanese.

Those who do not mention the possibility of a Japanese prophet tend to criticize Buddhism for being polytheistic and idolatrous, thereby reinforcing the putative monotheism-polytheism divide. Those who mention it, on the other hand, focus on the potential compatibility between Islam and Japanese traditions. In this regard they express doubt as to whether Islam can be contrasted with Buddhism and Shinto simply as monotheism and polytheism, although very few discuss the possibility that the Buddha was a prophet.[87]

The accounts that do not mention the possibility of a Japanese prophet tend to offer rather generalized views of Buddhism, usually paying no attention to the diversity found in Japanese Buddhism. Describing Buddhist teachings as "pompous, exaggerated and complicated,"[88] or "too profound and lofty,"[89] senior Japanese Muslims tend to focus on what they view as a Buddhist inability to "offer much on a practical level,"[90] so having "very little relation with the real practical world."[91] They also point out that many Japanese are "nominally Buddhists," and "not leading a life becoming of a believer,"[92] since they perform only funerals and ancestor commemorations in a Buddhist fashion.[93]

The work of Hiroshi Suzuki (1941-), a second-generation Japanese Muslim who has penned introductory books on Islam for a general non-Muslim Japanese readership, provides the best example of this kind of view. He contrasts Islam and Japanese religiosity as monotheism and polytheism, mentioning the presence of many gods and *hotoke*s (Buddhas) in Japan.[94] He is

87 In general, Japanese Muslims are much less willing than non-Japanese Muslims to recognize the prophethood of the Buddha. As converts, they are more hesitant than non-Japanese migrant Muslims in relating to Buddhism on a doctrinal level, as they feel this would compromise their commitment to Islam. Obuse, "The Muslim Doctrine of Prophethood," 224–6.

88 Ryōichi Mita, "Wareware wa naze isurāmu ni kie shitaka," *Assarāmu* 2 (1976) http://islamcenter.or.jp/jpn/assalam/AssalamuNo.2.htm [accessed 11 July 2010, page no longer available].

89 Fujio Komura, "Nihon to isurāmu," 2 parts, *Assarāmu* 56 and 57, http://islamcenter.or.jp/jpn/NihontoIslam.htm [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available].

90 Mita, "Naze isurāmu."

91 Komura, "Nihon to isurāmu."

92 Mita, "Naze isurāmu."

93 Komura, "Nihon to isurāmu."

94 Hiroshi Suzuki, *Isurāmu no jōshiki ga wakaru shōjiten* (Tokyo: PHP, 2004), 78. He is also very critical of the 'blasphemous' attitude of the Japanese who think they can choose a religion (and also gods) for themselves: ibid., 188. The idolatrous tendency among Buddhists (and Christians) is also mentioned in Komura, "Nihon to Isurāmu."

also highly critical of what he regards as the monks' monopoly of Buddhist *sūtra*s in Japan. According to Suzuki, Buddhist monks present these seminal Buddhist texts to ordinary people as something precious but incomprehensible.[95] He concedes that Islam may not appeal to the Japanese on the grounds that "unlike some strands of Buddhism and Christianity, [it] does not have an ideology of absolute non-resistance, which the Japanese love."[96] However, he also regards the latter two traditions as giving the Japanese a negative impression of religion "because of the grim tragic images generated by the stories of the Buddha forsaking his family and of Jesus dying on the cross."[97]

What is notable about these views is that, despite sounding rather critical, they do not criticize any fundamental Buddhist teachings. Their evaluation of Buddhism being too complex and impractical, coupled with their reticence on what Buddhism actually teaches, could even have positive implications for the overall assessment of Buddhism from an Islamic perspective. If the main problem these authors have with Buddhism is that it lacks the simplicity and practicality found in Islamic teachings, this may imply that Buddhism and Islam are similar in terms of basic tenets. And if Buddhists on a popular level are viewed as mistakenly engaged in 'idol worship' because they do not understand what their tradition really teaches, responsibility for this degenerate state of affairs would lie with Buddhist monastics rather than with Buddhism itself. In other words, if Buddhists behave in a way that is really 'becoming' of them, that is, if Buddhism is ideally practiced, then the effect of Buddhist teachings would be regarded as comparable to that of Islam. This suggests that these Japanese converts might view Buddhism as a tradition that was once correct (and taught by a prophet) but subsequently corrupted, using the concept of *dīn al-fiṭrah*.

Japanese Muslims who are more sympathetic to Japanese traditions, on the other hand, tend to assume that a prophet was sent for the Japanese. This seems to reflect the wish they have as converts that Islam be reconciled to their cultural background, thereby maintaining their connection to the wider Japanese society. While many look to Shinto rather than Buddhism for a Japanese prophet, when they do mention Buddhism, they show more awareness of different trends of Buddhism in Japan than the writers who do not mention the possibility of a Japanese prophet.

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95 Suzuki, *Isurāmukyōto no iibun*, 226.

96 Ibid., 218. The term *muteikō* denotes the notion of non-resistance, rather than non-violence. On the difference between the two, see Sachiya Hiro, *Shūkyō gekitotsu: bukkyōsha ga akasu isuramukyō to kirisutokyō no shinjitsu* (Tokyo: Bijinesusha, 2001), 41f.

97 Suzuki, *Isurāmu no jōshiki*, 232.

Concerning the Japanese Muslims' willingness to recognize a Japanese prophet, the position of the Japan Muslim Association is particularly notable. From the *dīn al-fiṭrah* perspective, they maintain that a Muslim prophet must have been sent to Japan to teach *islām* in a broad sense.[98] Expecting him to come from Shinto rather than Buddhism, they regard what could be the Japanese version of Allah, like Japanese Muslims of the imperialist period did (see Chapter 5), as Ameno-minakanushi-no-kami, "the lone god (Ja. *hitorigami*) who does not bear nor is born,"[99] comparing this to the Qur'anic passage (112: 1, 3): "Say: He is Allah, the One! … He begetteth not nor was begotten."[100] However, they admit that "[despite the similarity] the difference is too great," leaving open the question of how *islām* has manifested itself in Japan.

Similarly, Kō Nakata (1960–), a leading Japanese Muslim theologian, views Shinto as the Japanese *islām* without identifying who the Japanese prophet could be.[101] He is critical of the commonly held view that Japanese Buddhism and Shinto are polytheistic.[102] His willingness to relate Islam to Japanese traditions is also reflected in his support of the stance of Japanese Muslims from the imperialist period such as Ariga, which he calls a "development and deepening of the Islamic doctrines rather than syncretism."[103] In what looks almost like a continuation of their spirit, Nakata argues by reference to Ash'arī theology that salvation is to be granted even to those who practice ancestor veneration.[104]

Safa Sawada (1924–2012?) is more specific about how Islamic and Japanese religious traditions may be related, although many of the connections he makes

98 Nihon Musurimu Kyōkai, "Isurāmu Q&A," http://www.muslim.or.jp/%E3%82%A4%E3%82%B9%E3%83%A9%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0%E3%81%A8%E3%81%AF/#qanda [accessed 28 July 2022].

99 However, the term *hitorigami* denotes a deity who does not form a couple with another deity, rather than the only God.

100 Unless otherwise stated, the English translation of the Qur'an is quoted from Muhammed Marmaduke Pickthall, trans., *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ân* (Hyderabad-Deccan: Government Central Press, 1938) https://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/pick/index.htm [accessed 1 November 2022].

101 Nakata, *Isurāmu no rojikku*, 74.

102 For another Muslim criticism of monotheism-polytheism contrast, see Kawada, *Nihonjin joseishinto*, 29. Amongst Buddhists, Nakata expresses particular sympathy toward Jōdo-shin followers. Nakata, *Isurāmu no rojikku*, 72f.

103 Ibid., 94.

104 Kō Nakata, "Kyūsai no kyōkai: isurāmu ni okeru ikyōto no kyūsai," *Isshinkyō gakusai kenkyū* 2 (2006), 63–77. The possibility of salvation for non-believing Japanese has also been discussed in Yōhei Matsuyama, "'Fushinkō no chi' ni okeru isurāmu: māturīdī gakuha ni okeru senkyō mitōtatsu no tami no shinkō," *Isshinkyō sekai* 5 (2014), 89–101. The Ash'arī and the Māturīdī are two main schools of theology in Sunni Islam.

are rather random and not properly contextualized. According to this Shi'a Muslim, who also claimed to be the eighth successor of the secret teaching of Yuiitsu Shinto,[105] the correct teaching of Shinto has always been "the worshipping of the only creator God," Amaterasu-ōmikami.[106] Advocating that all religions teach the same truth, *islām*,[107] he regards Prince Shōtoku (574–622), a contemporary of Prophet Muhammad, as the Japanese prophet; according to Sawada, this widely venerated Japanese figure is not only the first successor of the secret teachings of Yuiisu Shinto, but also the founder of Japanese Buddhism.[108]

Virtually the only and most comprehensive reflection on the potential prophethood of Japanese Buddhist figures comes from Haruo Abe (1920–1999). Lawyer by profession, Abe was the executive director of the Japan Islamic Congress (Ja. Nihon Isuramu Kyōdan, now defunct), a controversial Japanese Muslim organization that claimed a membership of over 50,000 in the 1980s. This group employed various strategies of indigenization to make Islam accessible to the Japanese, such as soft-pedaling on dietary and dress rules and combining Islamic and Buddhist teachings.[109] Their stance can be gleaned from Abe's *Isuramukyō* (1986), an illustrated introductory book on Islam designed for the general Japanese readership. While holding Buddhism as conveying the message of *islām* to the Japanese, Abe argued for a "reform" of both Buddhism and Islam,[110] through which all religions would converge on the "*daijō* (Mahāyāna) Islam," the universal monotheism where Nyorai is

105 Yuiitsu Shinto (aka Yoshida Shinto) is a strand of Shinto established in the fifteenth to sixteenth century. It claimed the superiority of *kami* over Buddhas, against the *honji-suijaku* theory (of *kami* being earthly manifestations of Buddhas) that was dominant at the time. While Yuiitsu Shinto usually means the 'only' Shinto (way of the *kami*), Sawada understands it as the way of the only God (*kami*). Safa Sawada, *Nihonhatsu: isurāmu ga sekai o sukū* (Tokyo: CHC, 2004), 92.

106 Sawada, *Nihonhatsu*, 36.

107 Ibid., 32f.

108 Ibid., 92f. On Prince Shōtoku, see Chapter 5.

109 Apart from the reference to Pure Land Buddhism, the group also seems to have used Zen ideas to make Islam more accessible to the Japanese, such as the expression "zero is an existence," used by the founder of the group Hideo Futaki (1908-1992) to emphasize the smallness of human beings in the universe created by God. Futaki composed a piece of calligraphy bearing this message, where the word "zero" was represented with a circle, which suggests the influence of Zen calligraphy. Obuse, "Japan Islamic Congress," 258; Hideo Futaki (editorial supervisor), *Enchūtei nikki: machiisha 'enchū' to tatakau* (Tokyo: Nihon Isuramu Kyōdan, 1981), 40, 137; Haruo Abe, *Isuramukyō* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 1986) 160–61.

110 Abe, *Isuramukyō*, 6, 153.

worshipped as the absolute being.[111] He dismissed the traditional Muslim view that Buddhism is polytheistic as an attitude of "*shōjō* (Hinayāna) Islam," while arguing that Buddhists should get rid of their idolatrous tendencies and focus on worldly interests they have developed over history.[112]

In discussing how Buddhism differs from Islam, Abe, like other Japanese Muslim writers, brings in Christianity. He contrasts the Muslim aversion to images with the expedient use of images and the divinization of the Pope and Buddhist sect leaders,[113] and the word of God repeated by Muhammad with the man-made records of the words of the founders of Buddhism and Christianity.[114] He also presents the very human character of Prophet Muhammad as dissimilar to that of Jesus or the Buddha. Nevertheless, his personality is likened to that of Shinran, the founder of the Jōdo-shin school, "the greatest religionist of Japan, who dared to break the Hinayāna precepts by eating meat and getting married, thereby attempting to prove the possibility of attaining salvation in lay life."[115]

While critical of the "deviation" into "idolatry" and pursuit of worldly interests found among some Japanese Buddhists,[116] Abe sees Japan as having a religious climate generally suitable for embracing and enhancing the way of Mahāyāna Islam.[117] He recognizes various historical figures as its pioneers. A prime example is Dōgen, who he says taught against idolatry.[118] Although refraining from calling such historical figures prophets of Islam, since "they had never heard a single passage of the Qur'an," this Japanese Muslim regards them as "saints who, by divine providence, paved the way for the coming of Islam to the East."[119] This reinforces his view that Buddhism is the Japanese version of *islām*, a pure monotheism inherent in both Islam and Japanese religiosity.

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111 Ibid., 6.

112 Ibid., 148.

113 Ibid., 60–61.

114 Ibid., 88–9.

115 Ibid., 56–7. Shinran has also been compared to Prophet Muhammad by contemporary Buddhists: see below.

116 Ibid., 61.

117 Ibid., 152. Abe later summarizes this point more straightforwardly by saying that the Japanese have a latent inclination for monotheistic worship, purification of mind and body, and diligence concerning religious observance: ibid., 155.

118 Ibid., 152–4. Other examples include Empress Kōmyō (701–760) and the *myōkōnin*: ibid., 152 and 154. *Myōkōnin* are devout lay Pure Land followers whose words and deeds are regarded as representing the attitude of deep reliance on Amida.

119 Ibid., 154.

Through such a recourse to the Islamic doctrine of prophethood, with the eventual goal of guiding all Buddhists to Islam, Abe's agenda seems typically inclusivist.[120] His insistence that Buddhism is to transform itself in a Mahāyānist direction approaching this putative universal monotheism via the "great path of Islam (Ja. *isurāmu no daidō*)" may suggest that Islam, or at least *islām*, is the ultimate model of ideal religiosity.[121] Yet his view that both Nyorai and Allah will be worshipped in this putative universal monotheism as "the absolute being of the universe (Ja. *zettaiteki uchū seimei*)" or the eternal life that permeates the universe, coupled with the idea that both Buddhism and Islam are similarly in need of reforming themselves to reach that goal (rather than just Buddhism needing to emulate Islam), is a clearer instance of parallelism.[122] It is even a particularly symmetrical type of parallelism, as it recognizes equal potential in Buddhism and Islam to realize the ideal religiosity on the basis of their respective chief objects of veneration. Indeed, Abe seems to have been particularly familiar with Jōdo-shin Buddhism and regarded the teachings of the Qur'an as compatible with the concept of *zettai tariki* (the absolute Other Power, i.e., the salvific power of Amida, see Chapter 1) taught by Shinran.[123] While he speaks as a Muslim in his work, given his expressions of appreciation of Japanese Buddhism, especially the Jōdo-shin tradition, and his identification of Nyorai as the absolute Being, it is not entirely clear whether he views Japanese Buddhism (or Japanese religiosity) simply as a stepping stone for the Japanese toward accepting Islam, or regards Japanese Buddhism as having an equal value with Islam.[124]

Despite their willingness to explore the possibility of a Japanese prophet, that is, a prophet sent to the Japanese, Japanese Muslims do not agree with one another on who this could be. One potential reason for this lack of consensus

120 Ryūshin Azuma, a Sōtō Zen scholar, calls Abe's agenda "Islamic absolutism," observing that he is missing the "anti-dogmatist" element of Buddhist teachings, since "Dōgen denied both idolatry and anti-idolatry." Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 203–5, 209–10. For Azuma's view, see the next section.

121 Abe, *Isuramukyō*, 6.

122 Ibid., 6.

123 Akiko Komura, "Nihon ni okeru gairai shūkyō no dochakuka ni tsuite no kōsatsu: nihon isuramu kyōdan no 'daijō isurāmu' no shisō o rei to shite," *Kokusai kōdōgaku kenkyū* 10 (2015), 104.

124 Given Abe's familiarity with Jōdo-shin Buddhism, the term *nyorai* is most likely to refer to Amida. Obuse, "The Japan Islamic Congress," 257–9. The tension between inclusivist and parallelist elements in Abe's view is further seen in his argument that the practitioners of this putative universal pure monotheism are to take up the practice of identifying with this ultimate reality, using Buddhist terms for observation/concentration (Ja. *kan*, a type of Buddhist meditation) and training/practice (Ja. *gyō*): ibid., 164.

is the great variety of notable figures found across Japanese religions. Japanese Muslims may be particularly discouraged from considering a Buddhist figure as a prophet for Japan because of the absence of unity in Japanese Buddhism. This may have constituted the rationale for Abe naming many Japanese Buddhists as potential Muslim saints without selecting one as a prototype, which then would qualify as 'the Japanese prophet.' His focus on Amida Buddha as comparable to Allah in the universal monotheism he advocates, on the other hand, is most likely to derive from the former's position as the sole object of worship with a salvific role, within the Jōdo-shin tradition.

Contemporary Japanese Muslim attempts to identify a Japanese prophet seem to derive from the social and personal need to relate to religious traditions predominant in their native country. There is an imperative to find means by which to fit properly as part of their family and in the wider society. This concern manifests itself clearly, for example, in Nakata's attempt to clarify that the ancestor veneration practiced in Japan may be tolerated from an Islamic perspective.[125]

These Japanese converts are also keen on presenting Islam as relevant and accessible to wider Japanese society, whether they work toward correcting popular misunderstandings of Islam or criticize Japanese traditions and propose Islam as a better religiosity to the Japanese. In this respect, it is probably not a coincidence that the converts interested in doctrinal evaluations of Japanese traditions are mainly highly educated intellectuals, who are scholars of Islam or leaders of Muslim communities in Japan.

Thus, unlike the early converts' efforts to reconcile Islamic and Japanese traditions through encouraging the broader Japanese discourse of national cultural cohesion, the contemporary Japanese Muslims' agenda is motivated by more tangible social and personal needs. Regarding Buddhism, this is clearly manifested in the willingness of some Japanese Muslims to recognize 'monotheistic' aspects of Buddhism, although they seem cautious about naming a Buddhist prophet.[126] Furthermore, those who seek to relate doctrinally to

125 One of the major practical difficulties caused by the difference between Muslim and Japanese customs is found in arranging funeral procedures: Sakurai, *Nihon no musurimu shakai*, 189–90.

126 Compared with the trends found outside Japan, Japanese Muslim attempts to apply the doctrine of prophethood to Japanese traditions by evaluating their teachings are in line with the newly emerging tendency among some non-Japanese Muslims outside Japan, especially in the West, to explore the possible theological relevance of Buddhism through detailed theological evaluations of Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, contemporary Japanese Muslims' efforts to establish mutual relevance between Islam and Japanese traditions is also a practical matter; this is somewhat similar to the focus on communal

Buddhism in a more proactive fashion do not highlight the distinction between monotheism and polytheism as much as those who do not. As will be seen below, a critical stance toward this categorical distinction has been developed also by Buddhist writers who are willing to explore doctrinal comparability between Buddhism and Islam.

4 Buddhist Writings in Contemporary Japan

4.1 *Seeds of Parallelism*

While pointing out potential commonalities between major Buddhist and Muslim concepts, Japanese Buddhist writers who do not employ a systematic doctrinal perspective do not elaborate on them. This is attributable to their negative perception of Islam as intolerant of other religions[127] and the limited sense of connection they have with Muslims.

Ryūshin Azuma (1935–2022) was a monk-scholar of the Sōtō Zen tradition with an active interest in Islam and involvement with Muslims.[128] In his *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu* (Japanese Buddhism and Islam, 2002), so far the only book entirely concerned with the topic, he, on a par with several other contemporary Japanese Buddhists, regards Buddhism and Islam as highly different in nature.[129] While willing to work toward better relations with Muslims, he suggested that Muslims are more violent than Buddhists.[130] He was doubtful if

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issues found in regions with a long history of Buddhist-Muslim coexistence, such as South and Southeast Asia, although unlike Muslims from these places, Japanese Muslims do not name a Japanese prophet.

127 However, none of the Buddhist writers discussed here mentions the active support that Japanese Buddhists rendered to the nation's imperialist agenda during the war. Ryōmin Akizuki, *Gokai sareta bukkyō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006), 53.

128 His interest in Islam dates back to 1996, when he gave a speech on Buddhism in Syria. Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, i-ii, 7.

129 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyo to isurāmu,* 221.

130 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 10, 201–2. However, he later mentioned the prospect of improving relations with Muslims more positively. Ryūshin Azuma, "Bukkyō to isurāmu," Zen no kokoro (March 2003) http://www.daijoji.or.jp/cgi/nlm.cgi?action=work&no=5 [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available]. This was confirmed by my interview with him, in which he claimed to have changed his mind since the publication of his 2002 book about the prospects of Buddhist-Muslim relations: "there are indeed many Muslims who are gentle, tolerant, and willing to work for mutual understanding [with Buddhists]." Azuma's perception of Islam was also greatly influenced by a female Muslim disciple from Azerbaijan. Despite this, he tended to focus on differences between Buddhist and Islamic teachings, viewing Islamic doctrines rather negatively. My interview with Ryūshin Azuma at the Daijōji temple, 3 October 2008.

the Buddhist term *jihi* (compassion) should be applied to Allah, as in Japanese translations of the Qur'an, because "there is no notion of not tolerating or killing non-believers in Śākyamuni's Buddhism."[131] He was also cautious about drawing parallels between the two traditions on the level of fundamental doctrines, although he mentions the idea that the Buddha may be considered a prophet, without endorsing it.[132]

In his comparative essay entitled "Zen and Sufism," furthermore, Azuma describes the *nirvāṇa* of *arhat*s as "dispassioned intellectual clarity" (i.e., awareness), contrasting it with the experience of *fanā'*, which consists mainly of intense joy resulting from being in union with God.[133] In relying on Japanese translations of relatively old Western scholarship on Islam, notably that of Reynold Nicholson (1868–1946), Azuma seems to carry over its limitations.[134] While regarding both *nirvāṇa* and *fanā'* as a disappearance of ego-consciousness, he calls the former "completely negative," seeing nothing in it comparable to the *baqā'*, or "continuous life in God," of Sufism.[135]

Reacting to the Iraq War and the discovery of an al-Qā'ida cell in Japan, Ryūshin Oda, a monastic affiliated with the Kōyasan tradition of Shingon Buddhism, discussed in 2004 basic tenets of Islam by saying "we cannot but take interest in the Islamic tradition, which has so far been so unfamiliar to us,

131 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 195. Comparing the voluntary nature of following Buddhist teachings and the way in which faith is "imposed" on people at birth in Christianity and Islam, he further regarded it as inappropriate to use the Buddhist term *kie* (taking refuge) for Christian and Muslim attitudes toward God, suggesting that they are better described as submission (Ja. *fukujū*): Azuma, interview.

132 Ibid., 41. Regarding the question of God, he declared that "[Buddhists] do not believe in God," regarding it as a fictional existence (Ja. *kakū no sonzai*), comparing this to Amida Nyorai, Dainichi Nyorai and other Buddhas and *bodhisattva*s as "something human beings made up … because they needed it": Azuma, interview.

133 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 219–20, 238.

134 Nicholson argues that "[u]nlike Nirvana, which is merely the cessation of individuality, fana … involves baqa, the continuance of his real existence." Regarding *nirvāṇa* as "purely negative," he also observes that "[t]he rapture of the Sufi who has lost himself in ecstatic contemplation of the divine beauty is entirely opposed to the passionless intellectual serenity of the Arahat." Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 18. Similar views are also expressed by some contemporary scholars of Sufism: see, e.g., Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 310.

135 Azuma, *Nihon no bukkyō to isurāmu*, 219–21. This begs the question of why Azuma, an expert on Buddhism, simply appropriated Nicholson's description of *nirvāṇa* for his comparative discussion of Sufism and Zen, whose spiritual experience is known with more specific terms such as *satori* or *kenshō* (seeing one's own nature, i.e., Buddha nature). Despite the focus on Zen suggested by its title, indeed, in this piece he mainly discusses Sufi experiences in comparison with *nirvāṇa*, without actively employing the term *satori*. For a view detecting a *baqā'*-like element in Zen experiences, see Izutsu's stance below.

with the threat of terrorism becoming more real."[136] Expressing a strong reservation about the "intolerance of monotheistic religions," he contrasts Islam, in which "the believers gladly follow the divine orders like slaves," to Buddhism, where "one is responsible for everything one does."

Despite following the typical characterization of Islam as an intolerant monotheism, Oda also acknowledges the discipline found in Islam, saying that Buddhists could benefit from a stricter observance of religious rules in Islamic practice such as daily prayers, almsgiving, and fasting. He also points out similarities between the two traditions, most notably proposing the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha to be a Buddhist equivalent of Allah. He compares the phrase "No God but Allah" in the *shahādah* (Muslim profession of faith) to the Shingon mantra *on abira unken* ("homage to Dainichi Nyorai, the All-Pervading and Imperishable") or the Pure Land *nenbutsu*, *namu amida butsu* ("I take refuge in Amida Buddha").[137] While recognizing a common sense of faith shared between Buddhism and Islam, Oda does not elaborate on these parallels.

Sachiya Hiro (1936–2022) was a prolific Buddhist writer with an ecumenical stance. He has written on Buddhism and other religions for a popular readership. Hiro was by far the most appreciative of Islam among the major Japanese Buddhist writers. He calls Japan a "religion-empty zone," where the general populace has no deep understanding of what religion is.[138] His accounts of Islam mainly focused on correcting popular misunderstandings about it,[139] such as the so-called concept of "an eye for an eye"[140] and the notion of *jihād*.[141] Appreciating its idea of law for the earthly world (i.e., *sharīʿah*), Hiro also argued that "the reason that Islam tends to be misunderstood is that it

136 Ryūshin Oda, "Isuramu no shinkō to bukkyō," Kantōgen (June 2004) http://homepage3.nifty.com/mitsumonkai/home.html [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available]. For a similar view, see Seiichi Katō, "Kōbō-daishi no shuchō," 35, *Kōmyō* 142 http://www.buzan.or.jp/koumyou/142/shuchou.html [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available]; "Heiwa o samatageru shukyō to bukkyō no shuchō," *Buzanha karano shuchō* 1 http://www.buzan.or.jp/syutyo/index.html [accessed 11 November 2007, page no longer available].

137 The former is the Japanese reading of the Sanskrit mantra *om a vi ra hum kham*, which means that everything is attributed to Mahāvairocana Tathāgata.

138 Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran*, 236.

139 He attributes them to the logic of Western Christians, which the Japanese have accepted blindly as "the common sense for the whole humankind": Sachiya Hiro, *Dono shūkyō ga yakuni tatsuka* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1990), 117.

140 Hiro, *Shūkyō gekitotsu*, 41; Hiro, *Dono shūkyō*, 147–9; Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran*, 28.

141 He regards the spirit of *jihād* as almost the same as that of Gandhi's non-violent resistance. Hiro, *Shūkyō gekitotsu*, 37–44.

does not always say idealistic things as Buddhism and Christianity do."[142] He also critiques these other religions for being "extremely weak in dealing with real-life issues."[143] He even expected this realistic "order-type" religion (religion based on divine orders, Ja. *meireigata shūkyō*),[144] if properly understood, to spread fairly quickly in Japan.[145]

Regarding the doctrinal tenets of Islam and Buddhism,[146] Hiro notes only one possible point of comparison.[147] He compared the esoteric Buddhist concept of Buddha nature to the Islamic concept of Caliphate, through which ordinary followers can have direct access to the ultimate truth.[148] Although he did not mention any possible Buddhist counterparts for the Islamic notion of God or a prophet, his approximation of the notions of Buddha nature and the caliph (as a mediator of the truth for the ordinary populace) could be considered as another possible case of minimalist parallelism in that it provides an alternative way to suggest a parallel between a Buddha and a spiritually advanced being in Islam.

Kōsei Morimoto (1934-), former abbot (Ja. *bettō*) of Tōdaiji (the headquarters of the Kegon school and the center of Buddhist practice in medieval Japan), a historian of Islam and translator of Ibn Khaldun, has been engaged in various interfaith meetings. He, too, expressed concern with the recent aggressive activities of some Muslim groups.[149] Morimoto was reluctant to compare Buddhist and Muslim teachings, regarding Islam as primarily concerned with social rules and Buddhism with founder-worship.[150] While conceding the notion of *dharmakāya* (Ja. *hossin*) to be the Buddhist "substitute for God in monotheism,"[151] which could be considered as a seed of parallelism, he did not directly compare it with God.[152] He also mentioned the Muslim idea that the

142 Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran*, 36, 20.

143 Ibid., 20. This echoes Kono's remark below.

144 Hiro, *Dono shūkyō*, 26.

145 Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran,* 242 While he has not expressed such optimism after the 9/11 attacks, Hiro's understanding of the tradition does not seem to have been affected by it: see Hiro, *Shūkyō gekitotsu.*

146 While Hiro occasionally uses Buddhist terms to express Islamic concepts, such as *kisha* (for *zakāt*), *fuse* (for *ṣadaqah*), and *kie* (for *islām*), they seem to be used for convenience rather than with the specific purpose of drawing parallels.

147 He recognizes similarities between Islam and Shinto, such as the idea of an omnipresent formless divinity. Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran*, 227–8.

148 Hiro, *Hiro Sachiya ga kiku kōran*, 67–77.

149 Morimoto and Yamaori, "Bukkyō to isuramukyō," 252, 254–5.

150 Kōsei Morimoto, "Isuramu to bukkyō no hazama de 2," *Shunjū* 437 (2002), 19.

151 Ibid.; Morimoto and Yamaori, "Bukkyō to isuramukyō," 276.

152 He seems to suggest at one point that Islam and Buddhism are contrastable as monotheism and polytheism. Morimoto, "Isuramu to bukkyō," 21.

historical Buddha was one of the prophets, but again denies that the Buddha taught the notion of one and only God.[153] It is only through the lens of Sufism that Morimoto made more direct comparison of God and the Buddha. For example, he regarded "seeing the face of God" in Sufism as reminiscent of the Buddhist notion of *kenbutsu*.[154]

Although they are limited in scope, there is a considerable correlation between the views of these Buddhist writers and their denominational backgrounds. Particularly notable is the proposition of a Buddhist equivalent of the Islamic notion of God made by Oda, who, apart from the Three Jewels, regards Dainichi Nyorai and Amida Buddha as comparable to Allah. His openness to this possible parallelism may be due to there being a personified notion of ultimate reality (i.e., Dainichi Nyorai) in the Shingon tradition he belongs to. In contrast, the dismissive attitude that Azuma takes toward the concept of personal God is likely to derive from the fact that Zen does not posit a particular Buddha as a savior, but focuses on cultivating one's own mind to realize emptiness. This is also reflected in the critical tone he assumes when discussing the notion of Amida Buddha, which he indeed likens to God in Islam.

Despite pointing out various potential similarities between major Buddhist and Islamic concepts, these writers are reluctant to develop a systematic doctrinal discussion regarding how the two traditions could be related. The strong reluctance to compare the two traditions demonstrated by Morimoto and Azuma is particularly striking given their extensive experience of dialogue with Muslims. One possible reason, as gleaned from their frequent reference to terrorism, is that they find the violence committed by some Muslim groups so overwhelmingly alienating that they do not feel positively motivated to relate to Islam. While some suggest an association between the perceived aggressive or imposing aspects of Islam and its monotheistic nature, however, the contemporary Japanese Buddhist scholars discussed here do not resort to the putative antithesis between aggressive monotheisms and peaceful polytheisms. This may be because they would find it reductive to regard Buddhism as polytheism, although it may also reflect their wish not to vilify Islam (and Christianity) in such a categorical fashion. More generally, it may further be due to the fact that they do not subscribe to this rather superficial dichotomization between alleged types of religion.

153 Morimoto and Yamaori, "Bukkyō to isuramukyō," 271.

154 Morimoto, "Isuramu to bukkyō," 19–20. *Kenbutsu* means seeing (meeting) the Buddha as well becoming a Buddha oneself.

On the other hand, these writers' reservations about finding systematic doctrinal affinity between Buddhism and Islam may also be attributable to their idea that Islam is rather remote, unfamiliar, and even irrelevant to the Japanese. This is clearly expressed in the views of Oda and Hiro. Regarding Morimoto and Azuma, it is possible that they have not developed a strong sense of connection with Muslims because they have met Muslims mainly through official dialogues and have not had much direct personal involvement with them.[155] However, the similarities they suggested may be interpreted as first steps toward more fully-fledged parallelism.

4.2 *Toward a Fully-Fledged Parallelism*

The discussion of relatively detailed systematic interpretations of Islam features three distinctive views, by two writers with a Zen Buddhist background and one Jōdo-shin Buddhist. While they all have extensive inter-religious experience outside Japan, which may explain their willingness to relate doctrinally to Islam, their approaches differ from one another considerably, especially in the ways in which they present the conceptions of ultimate reality in Buddhism and Islam.

4.3 *Structural Parallelism of Mystical Experiences: Toshihiko Izutsu*

Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993) was an authority on Islamic philosophy and mysticism and translator of the Qur'an with a Zen Buddhist background. He had a highly international career which included long stints in Canada and Iran and numerous appearances at Eranos, an interdisciplinary academic discussion forum, where he lectured mainly on Chinese and Japanese philosophical traditions, especially classical Daoism and Zen.[156] Through conducting a "transhistorical dialogue"[157] of thought systems, in which various mystical philosophies originating in different places and periods of history are discussed side by side, Izutsu seeks to develop an "Oriental philosophy" (Ja. *tōyō tetsugaku*, as distinguished from Western philosophy), or "metaphilosophy of Oriental philosophies," by finding commonalities between philosophical traditions of the East.[158] The primary focus of Izutsu's project was on identifying a common

155 In my survey of Japanese Buddhist perceptions of Islam conducted in 2008, one Sōtō Zen priest stated that Islam was so remote that there was not much point in relating to it.

156 For the list of the topics he spoke about, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy: Collected Papers of the Eranos Conference*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2008).

157 Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 2.

158 These include a wide range of examples taken from Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, and Chinese traditions. Izutsu, "The Basic Structure," 1; Toshihiko Izutsu, "An Analysis

structure across mystical experiences achieved within these traditions, thereby devising a "structural parallelism."[159]

What sets Izutsu apart from many other scholars who have compared Islamic and Buddhist experiences is his recognition of a *baqā'*-like state in Buddhism. By comparing the so-called philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the Oneness of Being), associated with the teachings of the thirteenth-century Muslim thinker Ibn al-'Arabi, with that of Zen, he argues that "the fana'-consciousness … finds its exact counterpart in the Mahayana Buddhist conception of shunyata or nothingness,"[160] in which one witnesses the Reality, the originally undifferentiated metaphysical Unity of all things,[161] transcending the relative, impermanent world of "separation,"[162] as one's ego-consciousness becomes annihilated. According to Izutsu, both *baqā'* and the enlightened perception of the phenomenal world in Buddhism represent "the ultimate height of metaphysical experience," in which the person "sees himself and all other things around him [i.e., multiplicity] as so many determinations of one single Reality."[163] More concretely, he identifies the Zen experiences of *shinjin*

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of Wahdat al-Wujud – Toward a Metaphilosophy of Oriental Philosophies," in his *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), 35–55, esp. 35–6; Toshihiko Izutsu, "Ishiki to honshitsu: tōyō tetsugaku no kyōjiteki kōzoka no tame ni," in his *Ishiki to honshitsu: seishinteki tōyō o motomete* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983, 1991), 5–317. This chapter uses the term East and Eastern for the Japanese word *tōyō*, rather than "Orient" and "Oriental," unless the latter are used in quotations.

159 Toshihiko Izutsu, "Jijimuge, rijimuge: sonzai kaitai no ato," in *Izutsu Toshihiko zenshū*, vol. 9, *Kosumosu to anchi kosumosu, 1985 nen -1989 nen* (Tokyo: Keiōgijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2015), 6.

160 Ibid., 9. He also points out that Allah, the highest name of God, is just a name representing part of the Absolute, that is, a delimitation of the Reality: ibid., 24. This is closely related to the account of the known and unknown aspects of God, which is but one of the divine names (though the highest one). The term 'nothingness' is employed widely by Japanese scholars to mean emptiness, which does not necessarily mean a product of misunderstanding, but seems to reflect their preference or philosophical stance.

161 Ibid., 19.

162 Ibid., 11.

163 Ibid., 10. In more concrete terms, the process of the change of perception in Zen is traditionally presented as comprising three stages, in which a) one sees a mountain (essentially) as a mountain; b) one sees a mountain as a non-mountain (i.e., undifferentiated part of the Reality); and c) one sees a mountain (but without seeing its essential mountain-ness) as part of the Reality: Izutsu, "Ishiki to honshitsu," 139f. While Izutsu's focus is on the comparability of this Zen teaching to the Sufi notion of God as an undifferentiated Reality, he also likens the mental process of differentiation to the creation in "monotheistic traditions" represented in "mainstream" Islam and the Old Testament in which God bestows on all things their essences, or more precisely distinguishes them essentially: ibid., 149–51. Alongside this fundamental parallelism established on the level

datsuraku ("mind-and-body-dropping-off") and *datsuraku shinjin* ("dropped-off-mind-and-body") as corresponding to *fanā'* and *baqā'*, respectively.[164]

Izutsu's "synchronic structuralization (Ja. *kyōjiteki kōzōka*)" was a method for establishing what may be termed a comparative mystical philosophy. His use of this parallelist approach seems to have been motivated primarily by methodological considerations. Focusing on structural parallels and conceptual equivalents found across major religious traditions allows him to bypass the possible dead-end that would accompany attempts to compare directly the contents of ultimate spiritual experiences. This also means that, in a quintessentially parallelist way, he can let his parallels suggest the potential conversions of different conceptions of ultimate reality, thereby avoiding blatantly pronouncing them to be pointing to the same thing.[165] In drawing out common structures across various traditions, it may be argued that Izutsu has imposed the concepts of Islamic philosophy, *waḥdat al-wujūd* in particular (the centerpiece of his comparison), on a Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview and Zen experience. For example, regarding Izutsu's potential tendency to rewrite Buddhist philosophy with Islamic terms, Azuma once remarked that he finds Izutsu's work on Buddhism to be rather incomprehensible because it has been transformed into Islamic philosophy.[166] However, it is perhaps possible to say that Izutsu's openness to a strategic and creative "misreading" of classical texts is predicated on his commitment to contributing to the contemporary goal of inter-civilizational understanding, rather than that of hermeneutical accuracy pursued through purely philological methods.[167]

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of the experience of Reality, Izutsu also points out two other related levels of commonality between Buddhism and Islam (alongside other traditions), namely the concept of "the Perfect Man," which refers to individuals who realize and therefore embody the Real, such as the Buddha and the Prophet in Islam, and the 'essence' that constitutes the fundamental quality of such spiritually accomplished beings (but which is also inherent in all beings), such as the Buddha nature in Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Muhammadan reality in Islam: see Chapter 1.

164 Izutsu, "The Basic Structure," 9–10.

165 Unlike other parallelists, Izutsu does not ostensibly search for a Buddhist equivalent of God. For example, he almost never mentions Amida Buddha. This is perhaps because even God as such is but one conception of Reality. The only possible exception may be the concept of Dainichi Nyorai as the Dharmakāya (Ja. *hosshin*) developed by Kūkai, the founder of the Shingon school, which Izutsu identifies as the undifferentiated ground of being. Izutsu, "Ishiki to honshitsu," 230–5. See also Toshihiko Izutsu, "Imi bunsetsu riron to Kūkai: shingon mikkyō no gengo tetsugakuteki kanōsei o saguru," in his *Imi no fukami e: tōyō tetsugaku no suii* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1985, 2019), 264–307.

166 Azuma, interview.

167 Izutsu, "Imi bunsetsu riron to Kūkai," 264–5. For more on Izutsu's approach to civilizational dialogue, see, e.g., Toshihiko Izutsu, "Ningen sonzai no gendaiteki jōkyō to tōyō tetsugaku," in his *Imi no fukami e: tōyō tetsugaku no suii* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2019), 11–56.

It is also important to note that Izutsu's recourse to parallelism is not a simple matter of being philosophically or theologically 'soft' and gently guiding his readers to acknowledge the fundamental unity of all, as if to espouse pluralism (or perennialism for that matter), for two possible reasons.[168] Firstly, according to Izutsu, the oneness of Reality that exists beyond all human conceptions of it is never a fixed entity or origin. The second reason is that he regarded concrete perceptions of Reality as real and relevant in their own right, in that they are the only manifestations of metaphysical Reality that are available to us. It is these variegated cultural expressions, whose specificities are to be equally respected, that constitute the 'real' world for human beings (whose perceptive capacity is extremely limited), and one can only approximate (rather than presuppose) the existence of the One Reality through exploring them.[169] In other words, parallelism allows him to maintain the focus on the plurality of perspectives on ultimate reality, while eliciting mutual affinities among them.

4.4 *Emptiness-Based Inclusivism: Masao Abe*

Masao Abe (1915–2006), a Zen scholar of the Rinzai tradition who was originally a Jōdo-shin follower,[170] argues for the unity of all religions based on the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Abe succeeded D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) in continuing the mission to disseminate Japanese Buddhism in the West. He had a long-standing career in the USA[171] during which he showed a particularly keen engagement in discussing Christianity with Christian theologians.[172] Abe's basic perception of Islam is revealed in his accounts of Christianity and the religious diversity of the world.

In comparing Buddhism, one of the "Oriental" religions, with the "Western religions" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Abe contrasts the Buddhist Dharma expressed as dependent origination and emptiness with the concept of the personal God found in the latter. Examining the concepts of the ultimate

168 See Chapter 1 for the definitions of these terms.

169 Eisuke Wakamatsu, *Izutsu Toshihiko: eichi no tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Keiōgijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2011), 329–30, 334, 339–40.

170 For his 'conversion,' see, e.g., Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, Seiichi Yagi, and Masao Abe, *Kaku no shūkyō* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1980), 165f.

171 Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 102; Steven Heine, "Foreword," to *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue: Part One of a Two-Volume Sequel to Zen and Western Thought*, by Masao Abe, ed. Steven Heine (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), vii.

172 He approximates the concept of *kenosis* (self-emptying of God) in Christian theology to the Buddhist notion of *śūnyatā*. Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, eds. John B. Cobb Jr. and Christopher Ives (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 3–65.

truth in both types of traditions, he argues that the "[m]onotheistic oneness is before the realization of 'great zero', whereas non-dualistic oneness is oneness through and beyond the realization of 'great zero'." This is because, while "there is no separation between non-dualistic oneness and individual things," that is, 'the one and the many,' monotheistic oneness is "somewhat 'over there', and does not immediately include the two."[173]

Thus, seeing this "great zero" as an overarching principle of the universe, Abe puts forward a worldview that incorporates all the major traditions of the world, on the basis of the concept of emptiness, which is "a positionless position."[174] He divides major figures and concepts of different religions into three levels, using the *trikāya* doctrine.[175] Abe calls *nirmāṇakāya* (the Enjoyment Body) Lord, *saṃbhogakāya* (the Emanation Body) God and *dharmakāya* (the Truth Body, i.e., emptiness) Boundless Openness, respectively.

Concretely, Muhammad is placed on the level of Lord, along with Jesus and Gautama, and Allah on the level of God, alongside Yahweh and Amida. On the other hand, the principle of Boundless Openness, or "Formless and boundless reality of Emptiness," is shown to be shared by all world religions.[176] Abe puts forward his theory as a way of proposing the unity of all religions. He considers this theoretical approach as a tool to be used "to promote mutual understanding of religions," urging "each religion today to break through its traditional forms of doctrine and practice and to realize the dynamic ground, 'Boundless Openness', as its own basis."[177]

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173 Masao Abe, "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Its Significance and Future Task," in his *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue: Part One of a Two-Volume Sequel to Zen and Western Thought*, ed. Steven Heine (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 6, 12.

174 Masao Abe, "'There is No Common Denominator for World Religions': The Positive Meaning of this Negative Statement," in his *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue: Part One of a Two-Volume Sequel to Zen and Western Thought*, ed. Steven Heine (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 42.

175 The use of the *trikāya* doctrine to incorporate non-Buddhist traditions into the Buddhist worldview has a precursor in the view of D. T. Suzuki, although he does not mention Islam. Regarding different traditions as skillful means (*upāya*) to reach one true religion, he argues that "Buddhists are ready to consider all religions or moral leaders of mankind … as the Body of Transformation of the Dharmakaya": Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 261. See also Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 53; Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 126.

176 Masao Abe, "A Dynamic Unity in Religious Pluralism: A Proposal from the Buddhist Point of View," in his *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue: Part One of a Two-Volume Sequel to Zen and Western Thought*, ed. Steven Heine (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 26–7.

177 Ibid., 35.

While he may have provided a useful strategy with which Buddhists could accommodate non-Buddhist traditions, it is clear that Abe intends to make emptiness, a fundamentally Buddhist concept, acceptable to followers of Abrahamic religions as a universal common ground.[178] Despite his claim that emptiness provides a basis for a neutral, universal, "positionless" worldview, what Abe actually proposes is an inclusivist worldview based on Buddhist teachings.

Although Abe may have ended up proposing to impose his Buddhism-based conceptual system on followers of other religions, a highly sympathetic response to his view has been put forward by a contemporary Muslim scholar. Yahya Michot (1952-), a Belgian convert to Islam whose expertise includes the thought of Ibn Taymiyya, amongst other things, argues that Muslims can understand the "hyper-transcendentalism of God" in Buddhism since God for them is *al-ghayb* ("hidden," i.e., ineffable). He finds Abe's theory, which describes Allah in terms of a Buddhist notion of emptiness, as the highest universal principle, acceptable to Muslims, so long as this Allah is understood to be the "known aspect of Allah."[179]

Although it is not widely represented among contemporary writers, Michot's approach, like that of Berzin (discussed in Chapter 4), attempts to draw parallels between Buddhism and Islam on the level of the ultimate truth, founded on the idea of Allah as a fundamentally impersonal being. However, despite this Muslim attempt to take Abe's theory further, the reference that Abe himself makes to Islam shows only a limited understanding of it[180] and does not show any awareness of the impersonal aspect of Allah.

4.5 *Parallelism between Allah and Emptiness/Amida Buddha: Rikyū Kono*

Rikyū Kono (1931–2021), a Jōdo-shin priest and scholar whose expertise covers English literature and comparative cultures, is probably the only contemporary Japanese Buddhist to have attempted a substantial direct comparison between Buddhism and Islam.[181] Kono became interested in Islam through his

178 Some call it "coercive inclusivism": see Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*, 102f.

179 Mentioning the view of Ibn Taymiyya that too transcendentalist an understanding of divinity gives rise to a temptation to re-introduce images and intermediaries (faces and avatars), Michot argues that atheism (such as Buddhism) is a too abstract, depersonalized and nihilistic notion of divinity, i.e., hyper-transcendentalism. Yahya Michot, conversation with the present author, 26 March 2007.

180 It is possible that Abe, like some other Japanese scholars, understood part of Islamic doctrines in analogy to Christianity. Abe, "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," 6–7.

181 The writings discussed here are: Rikyū Kono, "Kōran ni mirareru arrā to shinran no amidabutsu," *Indotetsugaku bukkyōgaku* 4 (1989): 325–33; *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*

exchange with a Pakistani Muslim landlord when he lived in London in the 1970s. Given the sense of connection he experienced with Muslims, he focused on comparing the two traditions from the Jōdo-shin perspective, to contribute to mutual understanding between the followers of the two traditions and facilitate their communication.[182] He initially published his observations in academic publications, but later shared his views of Islam with followers of Jōdo-shin Buddhism through talks and popular books.[183]

In his writings, Kono employs a parallelist approach, a conscious decision he made through his communication with his Pakistani Muslim friend during his sojourn in London, who he suspected was suspicious about the contents of his publications about Islam.[184] Kono's parallelism focuses on doctrinal issues,[185] especially on similarities between Allah and (Amida) Nyorai. He regards both as the one and only savior, to be surrendered to and worshipped by their

(Tokyo: Hokuseidō Shoten, 1995); *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2003); *Isurāmu no kokoro, shinshū no kokoro* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2004). While the first three are of an academic nature, the other two are for a popular readership.

182 Regarding Islam, he does not seem to concentrate on any specific trend, but relies on the works of Toshihiko Izutsu, such as *Isurāmu seitan* (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1979). Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 307. He also seeks to revitalize his own tradition through his comparative reflections, encouraging the members of his religious community to "learn from revealed religions," especially Islam. Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 371. See also Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, 4, 31, 235; *Isurāmu no kokoro*, 9–10. For more on Kono's engagement with Izutsu's approach, see Kieko Obuse, "An East-East Encounter in the West and its Reverberations in the East: A Japanese Pure Land Buddhist's Engagement with Islam," in *Globalisation and its Enchantments: Cultural Encounters and Exchanges between Japan and the Middle East*, eds. Hatsuki Aishima and Laurent Mignon (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

183 His 2003 and 2004 books are good examples. Kono was also invited to give a talk to a Muslim audience on Islam and Jōdo-shin Buddhism in 2008. Rikyū Kono, "Isurāmu no kokoro, shinshū no kokoro," speech delivered at Tokyo Camii and Turkish Culture Center (27 April 2008) http://www.tokyocamii.org/docfiles/videos/video:18/lang:en [accessed 13 April 2010].

184 "No one likes to have their own religion criticized by others. I think that is why he asked me to explain what my book was about. … On the basis of the lesson I learned in London at that time, I have decided to [simply] present the facts [about different religions], and to let the readers compare them and judge for themselves. When it comes to comparison, one is inclined to compare and decide which is better, but such judgment depends on the individual." Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, iv.

185 Regarding practices, he is particularly favorable to the Islamic system of *zakāt*, contrasting this with the "rather conceptual" life of Jōdo-shin followers. Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 369–71. For his appreciation of the way faith is lived out among Muslims, see also Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, 226, 235.

followers.[186] They are also said to share characteristics such as being formless, colorless, and having many names to show their different attributes.[187] Kono adds that the originally formless Amida appears to his followers as a "personified God … merciful and compassionate,"[188] as if he was God.[189] Although he also observes that Allah punishes those who do not follow His teachings, contrasting it with the way Amida Buddha grants universal salvation even to people who have done wrong accepting them as they are,[190] Kono is generally focused on commonalities between Allah and Amida Buddha.

Kono's willingness to emphasize the comparability of Allah and Amida Buddha as manifestations of emptiness is also reflected in the way he identifies the attitudes of Muslims with those of Jōdo-shin followers.[191] For example, he views the Islamic notion of *'abdullāh* (servant of God) to be in line with the idea in the Jōdo-shin tradition of becoming a slave (Ja. *dorei*) to Nyorai.[192] Regarding *islām* and *kimyō* as referring to the same type of commitment,[193] Kono further suggests that (Jōdo-shin) Buddhism be recognized as genuine by Muslims on the basis of the Qur'anic statement: "the only genuine religion is *islām*."[194]

While the majority of observations Kono provides on Buddhism and Islam are made from a parallelist perspective, he also makes a few brief remarks which could suggest inclusivism. For example, he observes that creation (by God) can be considered to occur when the time is ripe in terms of dependent

186 Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 355. Although everything is "empty," Kono argues that it is permitted to "worship the formless Amida Buddha via statues and paintings … [which are] expedient *dharmakāya* (Ja. *hōben hossin*)."

187 For example, see Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 306–8.

188 Ibid., 317.

189 He, like Abe above, seems to be unaware of the distinction made in Islam between the impersonal and personified aspects of God, regarding Him primarily as a personal God.

190 Like some other Buddhists in and outside Japan, he attributes this to the dualistic worldview of Islam. Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 341–2, 349, 364. See also Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, 62.

191 Kono, *Isurāmu no kokoro*, 81f. He also compares Prophet Muhammad and Shinran as receivers of the messages (i.e., the revelation) of Allah and of Amida Buddha (i.e., *hongan*, original vow) respectively: Kono, "Kōran ni mirareru arrā," Ch. 1; *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 326–50; *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, Ch. 5; *Isurāmu no kokoro*, Ch. 5.

192 Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 325.

193 Describing *islām* as "submitting oneself to Allah," Kono uses the word in a Buddhist context, such as "[to] *islām* to the Amida Buddha." Kono, *Isurāmu no kokoro*, 53. Like the term *namu*, *kimyō* means to take refuge in the Buddha's teachings, submitting oneself to him.

194 Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, 19. Although the passage is not specified, it is most likely to be 3: 19.

origination.[195] He also expresses his personal belief that "Amida Nyorai becomes manifest in foreign cultures sometimes as Allah and sometimes as Jesus."[196] This is in line with the tendency found among the representatives of socio-politically motivated parallelism (such as those from Southeast Asia discussed in Chapter 4), where the writer limits the discussion of their personal theological stance, whether it is pluralism or inclusivism, to a minimum, and brings the affinity between major concepts of Buddhism and Islam to the fore.

Just as with the major examples of Buddhist-Muslim writing found in the global context (such as Berzin and Shah-Kazemi discussed in Chapter 4), Izutsu, Abe, and Kono undertake their comparative discussions by focusing on the concepts of ultimate truth, developing parallelism and inclusivism. Three major factors seem to contribute to their interpretative differences, namely (a) their denominational background, (b) their understanding of the Islamic concept of God, and (c) the social contexts in which they operated.

Both Izutsu and Abe deal with the concept of the ultimate truth as being the absolute ground of all things, the nameless Reality that has in itself no fixed attributes. This reflects the notion of emptiness as the ground of existence (called "great zero" by Abe and "zero point" by Izutsu),[197] emphasized particularly in Zen. The thoroughly depersonalized idea of the ultimate truth employed in Zen also seems to explain the relatively little importance they both attach to the notion of a personal God, or to any particular Buddha as a savior, for that matter. However, while Izutsu focuses on the parallels between different perceptions of Reality, Abe strongly argues for the ultimate oneness of them, urging non-Buddhists to think beyond their conceptions of ultimate reality. This is partly due to Abe's lack of awareness of the impersonal aspects of God (or the ultimate truth) in Islam and of a non-dualistic philosophical strand of Islamic (Sufi) thought.

In contrast, the centrality of Amida Buddha in Kono's analysis clearly reflects his commitment to the Jōdo-shin tradition, which also explains why he compares Prophet Muhammad to Shinran, rather than to the historical Buddha.[198] This also seems to explain the clear structural differences between the approaches taken by Abe and Kono, who both agree that God is comparable to Amida Buddha. While Abe's approach is thoroughly inclusivist, viewing

195 Kono, *Hikaku bunka nyūmon*, 315–6.

196 Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, ix.

197 See, e.g., Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ishiki no keijijōgaku: 'daijōkishinron' no tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron Shinsha, 1993, 2001), 44.

198 Yet, Kono acknowledges the Muslim idea of the historical Buddha being a prophet. Kono, *Yudaya kirisuto isurāmu shinran*, 117; Kono *Isurāmu no kokoro*, 89.

emptiness as the ultimate principle governing all world religions, and locating Amida Buddha and God on a different (lower) level of abstraction, Kono is focused on drawing parallels between God and Amida Buddha, leaving the distinction between emptiness and Amida Buddha unclear. Although he most often compares Amida to Allah as a personified God (and as a manifestation of emptiness), he sometimes presents Amida as the work of emptiness or as emptiness itself.

The difference between Izutsu and Kono, who both employ a parallelist approach, may also be attributed partly to the above-mentioned denominational factor, that is, the Zen idea of the ultimate truth as the ground of all phenomena on the one hand, and the focus on Amida Buddha as a savior figure and major object of veneration in Jōdo-shin Buddhism on the other. The emphasis that Izutsu places on the structural parallels between the mystical experiences in (Zen) Buddhism and Sufism certainly is attributable to the expert knowledge that he has in Islamic philosophy, which most contemporary Buddhist writers do not possess.

In terms of social context, the enthusiasm shared by all three scholars to reflect at length on potential doctrinal resonances between Buddhism and Islam appears to derive from their experience of extended inter-religious interactions outside their native country. They are also all committed to dialogue. Abe was a leading Buddhist voice on the scene of the bourgeoning Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the USA. Kono's willingness to enhance Buddhist-Muslim relations and their mutual understanding at a grassroots level is extremely clear from the fact that he, in his capacity as a Jōdo-shin priest, shared his observations with his fellow Buddhists as well as with a Muslim audience in Japan. Although he did not participate in conventional inter-religious dialogues, Izutsu also advocated the need for dialogue between Western and Eastern cultures. After all, it is to the end of facilitating dialogue between the East and the West that Izutsu was devoted to constructing a unified "Oriental philosophy."[199]

As for why Abe concluded with an inclusivist approach, two possible reasons can be proposed. The first is the influence of the Kyoto school of philosophy, which has been criticized for its notion of cultural uniqueness and the spiritual superiority of the Japanese, expressed particularly in terms of Zen.[200] The second is the absence of a practical perspective on inter-religious encounters.

199 Izutsu, "Ningen sonzai no gendaiteki jōkyō," 36.

200 See, e.g., James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, *Rude Awakenings: Zen, Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995).

This seems to derive from the highly academic nature of the discourse he was engaged in.[201] It is to be conceded, however, that Abe's inclusivist inclinations cannot be attributed simply to the fact that he was speaking from a highly academic standpoint, because Izutsu, whose sphere of activity was equally, if not more, scholarly than Abe's, developed a thoroughly parallelist approach.

Although Izutsu restricts his attention to scholarly discussions of different religious traditions from a philosophical-linguistic perspective, his focus on the East-West dialogue also possesses a socio-political subtext that goes back to the imperialist period. He started studying Islam when the idea of antagonism between the East and the West was becoming dominant. Izutsu was a junior associate of such political figures as Shūmei Ōkawa, a prominent Pan-Asianist with a strong view of East-West rivalry.[202] It was part and parcel of this politicized civilizational thinking to explore similarities among, and a possible unity of, Eastern traditions, including Islam. Izutsu appropriated this conceptual framework, although he defined his "spiritual East" through his personal feelings, rather than considering the state of international politics of his time, including "what [he felt] as an Easterner to belong to [his] own cultural sphere" on the basis of his reading of classical texts.[203] Izutsu's focus on mystical thought (and more broadly spiritual experience), therefore, distinguishes his work from Pan-Asianist discussions of Islam, which paid more attention to socio-political dimensions.[204] Thanks to its specific focus, Izutsu's work can be said to have heralded the emergence of the fuller-fledged Buddhist-Muslim parallelism undertaken a few decades later by Shah-Kazemi (discussed in Chapter 4), who, by embracing a similar perspective on Islamic mysticism centered on the notion of oneness of Reality, identified a wider range of parallels between the two traditions, recognizing in Buddhism the presence of states of consciousness that are comparable to *fanā'* and *baqā'*.

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201 The inter-religious dialogues he attended were mostly academic in nature and were not focused on practical aspects of inter-religious relations: see, e.g., Seiichi Yagi and Masao Abe, *Bukkyō to kirisutokyō* (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1981); Masatoshi Doi, *Shinran to kirisutokyō* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1990).

202 Reiji Andō, "Daitōa kyōeiken no tetsugaku: Ōkawa Shūmei to Izutsu Toshihiko," *Asoshie* 17 (2006), 111–25.

203 He indicates ancient Greece, especially Neo-Platonism, to be included in the category. Toshihiko Izutsu, "Tōyō tetsugaku no kongo: isuramu to nihon," in *Izutsu Toshihiko zenshū bekkan* (Tokyo: Keiōgijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2016), 140.

204 For example, reference to Sufism is absent from Ōkawa's writings during the imperialist period. See Akira Usuki, "A Japanese Asianist's View of Islam: A Case Study of Ōkawa Shūmei," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 28: 2 (2012), 59–84.

Kono, on the other hand, has a clear sense of social agenda in employing a parallelist approach, which makes his approach form part of the new trend found in contemporary Buddhist-Muslim discussions. Although his parallelism derives originally from his own experience with a Muslim friend and therefore is expressed in a highly personalized fashion, it is supported by his wish to relate better with Muslims in general. As a leading representative of his tradition, Jōdo-shin Buddhism, Kono operates on a more grassroots level than Izutsu, communicating his ideas to Buddhists and Muslims across a broader spectrum of society. In terms of his commitment to providing comparative discussions that would be conducive to inter-religious reflections between Buddhists and Muslims as a whole, Kono's stance is similar to the parallelist voices expressed in Southeast Asia. With his focus on discussing a Buddhist counterpart of Allah, his approach is particularly in line with those of the two fellow Buddhist scholars Buddhadasa and Berzin (as well as the Muslim scholar Shah-Kazemi), who attempted to address the question of God directly (or to 'find God' in Buddhism). His decision to take a road more socially acceptable, on the other hand, resonates with that of Yusuf, who has actively appropriated the category of parallelism instead of pluralism, due to the negative press the latter acquired in Indonesia and Malaysia.[205] Thus Kono's example demonstrates a trans-regional presence of socio-politically inspired parallelism in the contemporary scene of Buddhist-Muslim engagements.

Despite displaying styles and trajectories highly distinct from each other, the two Japanese Buddhist parallelists, Izutsu and Kono, equally challenge the commonly employed framework of comparison in their effort to highlight doctrinal affinities between Buddhism and Islam. Their approaches were both motivated by their awareness of a need, considering the religious (or cultural) diversity of the contemporary world, to encourage more productive debates between the followers of different traditions. This shared commitment is also reflected in the fact that they avoid bringing up the inconclusive (and rather polemical) monotheism-polytheism distinction. In Kono's case, this may also be due to his affiliation with the Jōdo-shin tradition; as a follower of Amida Buddha, he was unlikely to describe Buddhism as polytheistic in the first place. Izutsu's project of establishing structural parallelism among various traditions, including Buddhist and Islamic ones, on the other hand, constitutes in itself a fundamental challenge against the comparative framework based on such categories as monotheism and polytheism. His emphasis on different ideas of ultimate reality (whether they are conventionally called polytheistic or

205 See Chapter 4 on their views.

monotheistic or even atheistic or non-theistic) originating from different perceptions, or variable articulations, of the one Reality renders the monotheism-polytheism distinction secondary, if not trivial.

The two Japanese examples of parallelism, provided by Izutsu and Kono, further suggest that in Japanese contexts the experience of dealing with Islam per se provides them with an advantage in developing a post-comparative study of religions. In-depth knowledge of Islam, through scholarly research and/or personal experience, can prevent these Japanese authors from perceiving (if not imagining) Islam in analogy with Christianity, thereby staying away from the tendency found among many Japanese intellectuals to apply myopically, or at least implicitly, the category of monotheism. By understanding Islam more on its own terms, they are more immune from grouping the so-called, allegedly monotheistic, Abrahamic religions as categorically different from Buddhism. This is also clear from the case of Abe, who seems to have lacked sufficient familiarity with Islam. He did not ostensibly mention the monotheism-polytheism divide either, yet worked with a similar, if more refined, categorical difference between Buddhism on the one hand and Christianity and Islam on the other, by contrasting them as having non-dualistic and dualistic worldviews, respectively.

It may thus be said that parallelism can significantly challenge the common recourse to the monotheism-polytheism (or, for that matter the theism-non-theism/atheism) divide, and even the tendency found in contemporary Japan to regard Islam as wholly other to Japanese religiosity. As the Muslim presence increases in Japan, it remains to be seen whether more parallelist views will be developed among Japanese Buddhists, and to what extent this will influence the public discourse on religious diversity, including the encumbering idea of monotheism-polytheism divide.

CONCLUSION

The Potential of Parallelism as a Method for Religious Studies

Our exploration of Buddhist-Muslim engagements has revealed the startling diversity and fluidity of the ways in which Buddhists and Muslims have interpreted the traditions they follow. The examples provided demonstrate how doctrines, rather than predetermining the mode of engagement, are negotiated via a dynamic dialectic often set against shifting socio-political, cultural, and personal factors, and thus significantly contribute to the de-essentialization of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. Contrary to the common perception that Buddhist-Muslim engagements are doomed due to the putative remoteness of Buddhism and Islam, there have been considerable efforts made by both Buddhists and Muslims to relate theologically to each other's tradition, especially in contemporary times.

At the core of this newly emerging interpretive dynamics in Buddhist-Muslim engagements is parallelism. Introduced as an additional category to the classical tri-partite typology of views of religious others (i.e., exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism) developed within the Christian theology of religions, parallelism accounts for an approach that seeks to bypass potential theological tensions and socio-political complications that accompany overly pluralist stances and produce affinity between different traditions. In the early stages of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, it took the form of proto-parallelism as Buddhists and Muslims employed the concepts of Buddhas and prophets, the highest prototypical 'holy beings' in Buddhism and Islam respectively, to make sense of each other's tradition. Such attempts to use these key conceptual assets in Buddhist-Muslim theological engagements were variably formulated to reflect the nature and extent of their contact. For example, the *Kālacakra Tantra*, an eleventh-century Indian Vajrayāna Buddhist text, articulates the perception of a Muslim threat that Buddhists developed within the complex scenario of religio-political rivalry unfolding in North India, while the *Jāmiʿ al-Tavārīkh*, produced in the early fourteenth century under the aegis of Il-khanid Mongol rulers, sought to incorporate Buddhism in the global Islamic history through recognizing the prophethood of Buddha Śākyamuni.

In Southeast Asia, the foremost stage of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim engagements, socio-political contestations between the two communities deriving from local, regional, and global factors have led variably to creative

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theological approaches evidenced notably in the emergence of parallelist views. In the region, the trend of suggesting resonance between the core teachings of Buddhism and Islam for the purpose of challenging the dominant divisive socio-political discourse of difference is being led by Imtiyaz Yusuf, who has actively pointed out parallels between the historical Buddha and the Prophet. Yusuf's trajectory showcases how parallelism came to be devised as a means of bypassing the possible criticisms from one's fellow religionists representing the conservative socio-political ethos of major Southeast Asian societies such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Southeast Asia has also been an important reference point for major proponents of parallelism based outside the region, such as Alexander Berzin and Reza Shah-Kazemi, who have taken stock of the situations surrounding Buddhist-Muslim relations in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively in developing and negotiating their parallelism. Unlike Yusuf, their approaches tackle the question of God directly, thereby possessing the potential to lead the Buddhist-Muslim theological reflection to new shores. Indeed, their work has started to stimulate the public discourse on Buddhism and Islam in these societies, revealing the importance of the roles played by transregional intellectual networks in the development of Buddhist-Muslim discussion in Southeast Asia.

Our survey of the history of Japanese engagement with Islam has also demonstrated the wide use of Buddhist categories to present Islam, first in the manner of proto-parallelism to facilitate understanding of the unknown tradition, and later in more visibly parallelist attempts to highlight the comparability between Buddhist and Islamic concepts. The latter type of representation was increasingly common when an inclusivist stance was developed in the framework of the contemporary rise of an Emperor-centered Shinto-based ideology to support the nation's expansionist agenda, in which the collaboration with, and control of, the Islamic world was a primary policy goal of the Japanese military authority. These endeavors were also heavily informed by Japan's wish to overcome the influence of the civilizational hegemony of Christian Europe from the late nineteenth century onward, as Pan-Asianist thought gained traction in the country. However, the interest in, and involvement with, Islam among the Japanese during the imperialist period, spanning non-Muslims and converts alike, was not simply the product of the political ethos of their times. This is because the earliest Japanese converts' reception of Islam was informed by their original religious backgrounds, which included Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity, and by how their commitment to Islam developed gradually after conversion.

The Japanese engagement with Islam in the post-war period, during which Islam has once again been regarded as a distant, foreign religion, has been

characterized by a domestic discourse of othering predicated on a stark distinction made between monotheisms and polytheisms, through which the irreconcilability of Islam (perceived as a key form of monotheism) with Japanese religiosity has been emphasized. Up against this current, Japanese Muslims display considerable willingness to relate doctrinally to Buddhism, which derives from the social and personal need to relate to religious traditions predominant in their native country. Some converts even recognize 'monotheistic' aspects of Buddhism, although there is no consensus as to who the Japanese prophet could be. Japanese Buddhist views have also started to show parallelist inclinations, including two fully-fledged examples of parallelism, provided by Toshihiko Izutsu and Rikyū Kono. Despite having different doctrinal perspectives based on Zen and Jōdo-shin traditions respectively, they both challenge the commonly employed framework of comparison in their effort to highlight doctrinal affinities between Buddhism and Islam. Kono's stance is very much in line with those found in Southeast Asia, in that he works with a clear social and personal agenda in choosing a parallelist approach. Developed with a keen awareness of the need to promote dialogue and mutual understanding with Muslims, his example evidences a transregional presence of parallelism in the contemporary scene of Buddhist-Muslim engagements. Izutsu, on the other hand, seemingly operated in a context removed from the socio-political reality of inter-religious contestation that other parallelists deal with. However, his commitment to exploring an alternative way to bring out the structural similarities found in different modes of experiencing and describing the ultimate truth, thereby pointing to their possible convergence, shares with other parallelists the urge to open up the inter-religious hermeneutic space to allow for different interpretations and sensitivities to thrive. In particular, Izutsu's emphasis on different articulations of ultimate reality (whether they are conventionally called polytheistic or monotheistic or even atheistic or non-theistic) has a considerable potential to render trivial the monotheism-polytheism distinction, which is not only emphasized in contemporary Japan but also reflects the global dominance of Euro-Christo-centric frameworks of discourse on religion.

While parallelism has acquired a new mode of application in contemporary times as a tool of socio-politically inspired theological meaning-making (as opposed to the proto-parallelism of intuitive cultural translation) and has challenged the dominant essentialized discourse of difference commonly developed on Buddhism and Islam, it is not simply a socio-political expediency. Although it is true that parallelists are driven by their conscious decision to highlight commonalities, particularly concerning the question of God that has long divided Buddhist and Muslim communities on an intellectual plane, their

interpretations of Buddhism as having an affinity with 'monotheism' are made as part of the rigorous theological reflections they undertake in a quest for truthful (though seemingly innovative) representations of different religions.

With its potential to de-essentialize religious traditions, parallelism can also serve as a possible tool to overcome the limitations created by the analytical framework commonly employed in the academic study of religion, by encouraging, and almost necessitating, a move away from the tenacious categorical straitjacket created by the Euro-Christo-centric parameters. Applied to an analysis of diametrically different-looking religious traditions, parallelism, especially structural parallelism as developed by Shah-Kazemi and Izutsu, would demonstrate differences produced through theo-centric categories, most notably monotheism and polytheism, and theism and non-theism, and even the distinctions between different conceptions of ultimate reality such as personal and impersonal, and ultimately transcendent and immanent, to be 'non-issues.'

Parallelism also constitutes a method in its own right for exploring religious diversity through which to transcend the limitations of traditional comparativism and pluralism. It does this not by rejecting comparison per se, but by refraining from having the final word on the matter, or closing the case, thereby relinquishing the hegemonic power deriving from the sense of legitimacy and authority that accompanies the finalizing and totalizing act of comparison and generalization. Pursued along this line, parallelism could open up a hermeneutic space beyond the parameters of the theology of religions, freeing it from the totalizing effect often attributed to the tendency of theologies of religions to close the case. It keeps the hermeneutic space open to mutual illuminations, where notions of 'boundaries' and 'otherness' are softened to highlight the intrinsic relationality of the traditions involved. Such an approach allows for the emergence of the diversity found within each tradition, as well as of possible common structures underlying seemingly incompatible worldviews.[1]

An important innovation in the method of analyzing religious diversity based on parallelism would be its involvement with history, shared by major

1 In this sense, the move to parallelism is resonant with the prospect of inter-religious theology, which operates within a shared, liminal, interpretive space, where the conversation is infinitely open-ended and processual. Rather than drawing sharp boundaries between these areas of theological endeavors, it is more methodologically fruitful to recognize their mutual dependence, relevance, and complementarity. See Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Sharada Sugirtharajah (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 20.

parallelists. This interest would entail an in-depth examination of historical encounters of followers (or carriers) of different traditions, especially their cross-fertilization through socio-cultural interactions,[2] as well as the modalities through which different historicities affect modes of engagement between different religious communities.[3] Such a combination between the focus on conceptual parallelism (requiring decontextualization) and a keen attention to history (recontextualization) will lead to a more dynamically interdisciplinary approach to the study of inter-religious engagements through furthering the methodological integration I have proposed through the present work, namely an epistemologically apprehended theology (i.e., by tapping into the modes of knowledge internal to religious traditions) on the one hand and historical as well as socio-anthropological methods on the other.

Another fundamental aspect of this alternative method of capturing religious diversity will be the incorporation of what may be termed cross-religious perspectives, which entails a flexible and fluid use of doctrines and concepts drawn from non-Christian religions in particular. Preliminary steps toward this potential methodological innovation through an appropriation of theological tools of non-Christian traditions have already been taken in the present work. The foremost examples are the concepts of prophethood, sainthood, and the perfect human being (mentioned by Yusuf, Shah-Kazemi, and Izutsu), all of which refer to an extraordinary individual that not only provides a prototypical example of the highest spiritual accomplishment but also directly mirrors and embodies the ultimate truth (through the experience of *fanā'* in Islam and the realization of emptiness in Buddhism). This concept goes hand in hand with the idea of the Real, which is the direct translation of the Arabic word *ḥaqq*, but which also finds its Buddhist counterpart in suchness (*tathatā*), whether it is conceived as personal, impersonal, transcendent, or immanent,

2 Exploring historical encounters between Buddhists and Muslims in Central Asia, Berzin suggests the possibility that Buddhists may have come across Muslims as a People of the Book in that they had a *nom*, the Greek word meaning a book which Buddhists appropriated to refer to the Dharma: Akpinar and Berzin, "The Dharma of Islam." Izutsu, on his part, mentions a possible influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism on the development of Islamic mystical philosophy after the Mongol invasion, as well as the potential encounter that Kūkai, the founder of Shingon Buddhism, had with Neo-Platonism during his sojourn in T'ang China, which may explain the presence of structural parallelism between Kūkai's thought and Neo-Platonism. Toshihiko Izutsu and Ryōtaro Shiba, "Nijusseikimatsu no yami to hikari," in Ryōtaro Shiba et al., *Nijusseikimatu no yami to hikari: Shiba Ryōtaro rekishi kandan 11* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron shinsha, 2004), 303–5, 320.

3 Yusuf elaborates on the influence of the Nalanda narrative (see Chapter 4) and the general impact of colonialism on contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations.

in constantly manifesting itself in the phenomenal world. Some of these concepts, notably sainthood and the Real, have been employed by John Hick, the leading philosopher of religion, in developing his "pluralistic hypothesis" (see Chapter 1). However, these same categories can be used to develop a parallelist understanding of religious diversity, whereby the Real is defined anew, following Buddhist and Islamic worldviews, as self-manifesting in the world of experience, rather than being perceived and received variably by different human beings with different degrees of success in the real world, as assumed by pluralists.

Our survey of the diversity of Buddhist-Muslim engagements across history and in significantly different localities has revealed an almost inexhaustibly rich source of conceptual tools in the experience and articulation of the Real with which we could explore further and map the vast terrain of inter-religious engagements on a theological level, and the intriguing range of socio-political factors that help us explain the differing approaches to their religious others found within religious communities across the globe. As such, the study of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, and parallelism as its unique by-product, possess a significant potential to precipitate a methodological breakthrough within Religious Studies. The methodological value of the study of Buddhist-Muslim engagements is attributable to the very articulations of the Real by Buddhism and Islam appearing to be radically different. This is because examinations of theological negotiations between Buddhists and Muslims in contexts of socio-political conundrums where the ideas of Buddhism and Islam tend to be highly reified and essentialized push us to reconsider the ways in which we conceptualize religion. A more dynamically interdisciplinary analytical framework, inspired by further explorations of Buddhist-Muslim engagements, will allow for a more holistic, yet multi-faceted, analysis of inter-religious engagements, reflecting the fundamental relationality inherent in religious experience and articulation.

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Buddhist-Muslim relations are usually seen as inherently confrontational. This book challenges the view of Buddhism and Islam as fundamentally irreconcilable by exploring the diverse ways representatives of the two traditions have engaged each other in Southeast Asia — the global frontstage of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations — and Japan — a Buddhist-majority country whose 'Islam policy' played a significant role in its surge to global power status. It investigates the processes through which mutual perceptions and discourses have developed in response to shifting socio-political circumstances and via the intellectual interventions of leading personalities.

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